

# EXPERIMENTAL SELVES

## Person and Experience in Early Modern Europe

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CHRISTOPHER BRAIDER

# Experimental Selves

Person and Experience  
in Early Modern Europe

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# Acknowledgments

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This book came out in a rush during a year-long sabbatical following a four-year term in the role of what I came to think of as the Dean Who Wasn't One of the College That Didn't Exist. My task was in fact to oversee the creation of a new College of Media, Communication, and Information here at the University of Colorado in Boulder, and, as you can imagine, it was a bone-crushing and above all time-consuming experience. However, I did manage to keep reading, thinking, and note-taking, so when at last the moment arrived, I was ready to write, and rapturously happy to do so. However, I was left with little chance to share my ideas in the way I prefer to, especially not if the book was to see the light of day anytime soon. The result is that, while there are a number of people to thank, they are not nearly as numerous as they might have been.

Heartfelt thanks are nevertheless due. To Timothy Hampton and Hall Bjørnstad, first of all, who both read the introduction and gave me timely suggestions and the warmest support at a time when I worried that I might have forgotten how to do this kind of thing. Thanks also go to my dear old friend Daniel Shine, a physician and Miltonist with a Johnsonian sense of style who read every chapter as it came off my laptop, humanizing as well as guiding my wayward thoughts.

These three are joined by two other readers – Blair Hoxby and the anonymous second reader of the manuscript originally submitted to the University of Toronto Press. I cannot thank either of them enough for the shrewdness and precision with which they worked through my text. It is already rare enough to have readers who completely understand what you are aiming for. It is rarer still for that understanding to be translated into comments of spectacular helpfulness at every point. The final version of the book is accordingly a testimony to their combined generosity and perceptiveness. It would not be nearly as good without them as I hope it has turned out to be.

Versions of two parts of the book have previously appeared elsewhere. [Chapter 5](#), “Actor, Act, and Action: The Poetics of Agency in Corneille, Racine, and Molière,” was composed out of a journal article entitled “Acting and Ontology in Molière” contributed in 2012 to the 40th-anniversary volume of *Renaissance Drama*, new series, edited by Jeffrey Masten and William West, and an essay entitled “Actor, Act, and Action in Benjamin’s French Baroque,” included in a volume edited by Katherine Ibbett and Hall Bjørnstad titled “Walter Benjamin’s Hypothetical French Trauerspiel,” published in Fall 2013 in *Yale French Studies* 124. I thank all four editors for inviting me to participate in their efforts, and thus for putting me on a track I might not have found on my own. I am moreover particularly indebted to Katherine and Hall in that their volume began as a three-day seminar conducted at an annual meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association in New Orleans in 2010. Even if the essay I contributed to the volume was not the same as the paper I delivered to the seminar, the thought train the essay explores started there.

Meanwhile, a shorter – if still longish – version of [chapter 7](#), “Groping in the Dark: Aesthetics and Ontology in Diderot and Kant,” appeared in *Word & Image* 29.1 (2013), edited by Michèle Hanoosh and Catriona MacLeod. The original text benefited greatly from their attentions, and from those of their outside reader, Marian Hobson. Marian in particular administered a couple of swift raps across the knuckles I sorely needed.

Finally, and as always, there is Helen. I owe her everything, and not least life itself. I pray that Dostoevsky Boy may yet become the person she deserves.

# EXPERIMENTAL SELVES

## Person and Experience in Early Modern Europe

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# Changing the Subject: Early Modern Persons and the Culture of Experiment

In the third act of Molière's *Don Juan* (1665) occurs a scene that speaks directly to my thesis. The title character and his servant Sganarelle travel through a forest in flight from armed horsemen intent on avenging their jilted sister's honour. The heat of the chase now past, they lapse into conversation when, taking his cue from the doctor's robe he wears as a disguise to help cover their flight, Sganarelle's thoughts turn to doctrine. Having ascertained that Don Juan believes in neither God nor the Devil, the After Life nor the Bogeyman, and that even the miracles of modern medicine meet with scorn, he demands to know what he does in fact believe. "I believe that two and two make four, Sganarelle, and that four and four make eight."<sup>1</sup>

Dismayed by the nihilistic poverty of his master's creed, yet emboldened by the air of authority his doctor's gown imparts, the comic servant launches into passionately unguarded speech. Though he is, "praise God," an ignorant man, even he can grasp the lessons of natural religion. "This world," he protests, "didn't spring up overnight like a mushroom." And where did the ingenious "contrivances" (*inventions*) that compose the human body come from if not the intelligent designer whose benevolent wisdom they proclaim? Warming to his theme, Sganarelle mounts a spirited defence of the core value his master's scepticism imperils: the dignity attached to even the most inconsequential human being. He asserts possession of "something or other" in his head capable of thinking a hundred thoughts in an instant and of moving his body in any direction he (or it) wills. He illustrates the latter point by breaking into a wild demonstrative dance – only to catch his toe in his robe and land smack on his face. "Good," Don Juan replies, "your argument just broke its nose" (875–6).

This inspired bit of metaphysical tomfoolery blends low-brow slapstick with genuine alarm at the moral implications of the master's cynicism. Unlike the fatuous tricksters of his sources in Tirso de Molina and the *commedia dell'arte*, Molière's Don Juan is a *libertin érudit* as well as a *libertin de mœurs*:

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a conspicuously literate materialist of a distinctly Hobbesian stamp for whom conventional morality conceals the fundamentally predatory nature of human appetite and relationship. Yet the upshot of the master's disabused assertion of humanity's innate savagery is not only the series of reprehensible deeds legend imputes to him – his heartless exploitation of women seduced by promises of marriage, bourgeois tradesmen to whom he fails to pay his debts, or pious fathers blinded by naive notions of family honour. It is the appalling realization that he *may be right*. The fright Sganarelle takes identifies the scene's mocking intertext. Foolishly garbled, and tangled in ludicrous pantomime, the tenor of Sganarelle's defence is unmistakably that of Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*.

Composed in 1486 to win over an audience of churchmen disquieted by the grandiose claims humanists made on behalf of unassisted human intellect, the *Oration* grants a quasi-angelic stature to the ideal of human learning embodied by "the philosopher." To modern eyes, as to those of the churchly sceptics whose misgivings Pico sought to allay, the *Oration's* philosopher is a dubious if not unwholesome creature. Pico infused him with an intoxicating mixture of arcane disciplinary practices culled from a dizzyingly eclectic range of sources. The speech draws on everything from the reconstructed remains of classical letters to alchemy, and from Jewish mystical writings to ancient Egyptian wisdom lore – much of this last forged by scholars only too happy to fabricate immemorial authority where they could not actually lay hands on it.<sup>2</sup> The philosopher's teachings thus fused kabbalism, hermeticism, and natural magic in a Christianized neo-Platonic brew calculated to secure both the intelligibility of God's cosmic plan and humanity's inborn power to comprehend it.

Pico's philosopher perches at the apex of the pyramid of lower forms of existence, scanning the heavenly kingdom beyond the fixed stars. In Piconian Man, God's creature soars in thought towards a true grasp of the cosmic order and the providential scheme to which it bears witness. Like all creatures, the philosopher is mortal. Yet the Creator's gift of reason imbues his earthly condition with the quicksilver of divinity. When we add charitable love for lesser creatures as expressive works of God's hand and the spirit of justice that entitles human beings to rule over nature in God's name, humanity's right triumphs over churchly suspicion.<sup>3</sup> The *Oration* becomes the model for the famous (if characteristically ambivalent) words of praise Hamlet (1603) pronounces on humankind's behalf to the venal courtiers, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:

What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals.<sup>4</sup>

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We should nonetheless not forget how deeply the *Oration's* euphoric optimism depended on its author's ignorance of impending events. In 1486, the tide of Italian humanism was still at its height and, though sorely strained, the unity of the Church was as yet unbroken. America lay hidden on the far side of the Atlantic, and learned contemplation of the awe-inspiring perfection of the Ptolemaic universe remained untroubled by Copernican heliocentrism. Above all, the political disasters unleashed by the French invasion of Italy in 1494, bringing in its wake an epidemic of syphilis whose timing induced Italians to call it the *morbis gallicus*, stood only on the horizon. Pico's faith in what he and his humanist comrades could achieve was thus almost wholly untested. Even as the neo-Platonic elements of his thought won such wide currency that the worldly nobles assembled in Baldassare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1528) could plausibly be said to embrace them, the world was about to change, leaving his stirring portrait of human excellence in ruins.

Whence the misanthropic twist Hamlet's boast takes the moment the words are out of his mouth, the encomium of the human species ending in a smutty double-entendre in which the lower registers of the human condition surge to the fore: "and yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me – no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so" (2.2.289–92). But whence too the catastrophe that overtakes Sganarelle's mangled version of Pico's address. Don Juan puts our deep-seated sense of human worth to a test it only survives thanks to a *deus ex machina* scene by which nobody was fooled even at the time. Further, the subject of that test, at once the patient exposed to what, using the period's legal term of art for forensic torture, Francis Bacon called the "vexations" of empirical experiment and the instrument employed to measure their effects, is the human person: Sganarelle of course, but also those readers and spectators whose own moral character falls under attack.

## 1. The Question

The episode highlights what I take to be the single most salient fact about self as early moderns increasingly experienced it: that it was, precisely, a matter of experience. Self, or, to use the word early moderns more freely chose, the person modelled for them in the avalanche of portraits that signalled its newfound primacy and ubiquity, was many things. It was a puzzling if (on the whole) admirable composite of physical and mental faculties: reason, imagination, the senses, memory, will. It had also acquired many things, and in particular, alongside sets of "natural" and "civil" rights people had not closely attended to before, a growing inventory of liberties and the possessions on which they bore: life and the freedom to preserve it; opinions and the freedom to express them;

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conscience and the freedom to exercise it; desires and the freedom to satisfy them; perhaps above all property and the freedom to make, consume, defend, buy, sell, and inherit it. However, as the early modern habit of inventorying such matters reminds us by pointing to the term's root in the Latin *inventio*, denoting an art of finding as well as creating, self was before anything else the medium and content of direct personal experience.

Not that either item was new. To be sure, concepts of self and experience were subject to dramatic transformations throughout the period, registered by shifts in how old words were used to describe the range of phenomena they covered and the minting of new ones to capture nuances that lacked proper names. Terence Cave charts the exemplary career of the French objective pronoun *moi* from the later sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>5</sup> Originally restricted to its core grammatical function as the form the first-person pronoun takes in becoming the object of a preposition or verb, *moi* began to compete with the more general abstract term, *le soi*. As Michel de Montaigne used it in the 1580s, *moi* remained an objective pronoun. Yet the word acquired new weight by signalling the experience of self as something inalienably personal, substantial, and unique. From there it was a short if momentous step to the full-blown substantive that Blaise Pascal deployed in the *Pensées* (1670) to single out what each of us encounters as the essential if, in his eyes, also hateful thing one just is.

Disturbed by Montaigne's quizzically decentred picture of self, René Descartes secured the sense of personal agency the *cogito* declares by replacing the inchoate objective *moi* of everyday experience with the self-determined *je* whose grammatical as well as philosophical privilege it is to think, will, apprehend, and decide. In answer, Pascal endorsed Montaigne's insistence on creaturely dependence on both external circumstance and largely unconscious internal biases and drives in order to refute what he saw as Descartes's arrogantly Quixotic claims. So it was Pascal who, in reformulating the question the *cogito* begs in identifying private consciousness as the self-disciplined ground of apodictic certainty, asked not, like Descartes, "But what is it then I am?" but rather "Qu'est-ce que le moi?" What is the poignantly vulnerable yet insatiably demanding creature each of us calls *me*?<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, self and experience have always been the object of the kind of personal preoccupation and care Michel Foucault recovered in ancient letters and sought to cultivate in his later private as well as philosophic life.<sup>7</sup> The Delphic injunction to "know thyself"; the Pauline picture of will torn between faithful hope of deliverance and the overwhelming cravings of sinful flesh; the secret longings of troubadours and knights errant; the heroic ego of epic, the self-overcoming Stoic, or the domineering medieval lord – not to mention the self-betraying ironies that beset everyone from Sophocles' Oedipus

or Plato's Alcibiades to Francesco Petrarca's *Secretum* and the first-person dreamer of *The Romance of the Rose*: all bear witness to the unbroken continuity of notions of self, experience, and the inextricable bond they form. As Pascal puts it to the model *honnête homme* of the day, the eminently self-fashioning bourgeois gentleman Damien Miton: "The *moi* is hateful. You cloak it, Miton, but you don't get rid of it for all that: you are thus always hateful" (Sellier 494). We may civilize *le moi*, giving it nicer table manners and habits of personal hygiene to form the self-policing *homo clausus* of Norbert Elias's account of early modern court life.<sup>8</sup> But whether, like Pascal, we loathe it, share the whimsical good humour with which Montaigne monitors its freakish flights, or join the satirical Molière in defending even as we mock it, we can never escape its insistent thingliness.

What is new however is that self and the experience in which it comes to be known were no longer seen as givens derived from the higher, a priori instances from which tradition derived them. In becoming Pascal's *moi*, self ceased to fit neatly into the pattern that enabled Aristotle to plot the "good" because "true" human being in terms of proximity to the rational norm placed at the midpoint between complementary vices of excess and deficiency. It was thus much harder to strike the natural balance that defined courage as the mean between rashness and cowardice, and lawful self-respect as that between Alcibiades' notorious hubris and the grovelling fit for a slave.<sup>9</sup> But self also ceased to express the divine will disclosed in scripture, the Patristic writings, or the moral law. While the notion continued to keep people up at night, they no longer saw themselves as helpless sinners whose worth was wholly determined by the struggle to conform to the temporal "estate" to which divine providence called them. They were then no longer simply what the consecrated order identified them as being: a knight, a lady, a priest, a peasant, a merchant, a king.<sup>10</sup> They had instead become the question Pascal asks: "Qu'est-ce que le moi?"

## 2. Evidence and Self-Evidence

What is more, answering that question turned out to be a factual matter, settled by empirical events. For experience too had changed in dialectical tandem with the sense of the self to which experience is given and by which it comes to be shaped and used.

True, as we noted a moment ago, experience and the empirical happenings from which it springs have a venerable history, antedating the upheavals of the early modern era. Indeed, following Aristotle, medieval scholastics had taught that all knowledge of the natural world begins in the senses long before John Locke made the notion the cornerstone of his empiricist account. But, as the

historian of science Peter Dear reminds us, the experiences in which the ancients and their medieval and early Renaissance successors grounded natural knowledge chiefly derived from the “common” experience of phenomena whose regular recurrence granted them the status of cosmological constants.<sup>11</sup> The sun was known to orbit the earth because it was an item of everyone’s plain observation that it rose in the east each morning and set in the west at night. Similarly, it was known that acorns grow into oak trees because they were invariably seen to do so under the right conditions of sunlight, rain, and nourishing soil.

However, as indicated by the circularity notions of rightness introduced into the mix, the truths of experience were not proved by experience except insofar as experience itself was seen to bear witness to those higher instances (the “final causes” of Aristotelian physics and biology or the mysteries of divine intent) that underwrote its intelligibility. Things happen, in this view, because it is in their nature to do so as expressions of a higher rational order, now immanent in the Stoic or neo-Platonic World Soul, now transcendent in the dispensations of divine will. A signal result was the difficulty the ancients and their medieval and Renaissance successors had in explaining “unnatural” events: those deviations from the norms of common experience seen as miracles, monsters, or portents precisely because they lacked a basis in the system of readily graspable reasons dictated by piety, by philosophical contemplation of the timeless “nature of things,” or simply by the fact that such is the common order of everyday observation.<sup>12</sup>

But that is the point, and nowhere more visibly or dramatically than in what experience was seen to reveal about our own natures as human beings. For its lessons lost the status of being mere illustrations of a priori truths like those that had once taught what “good” because “true” human beings are. According to the “exemplar” theory of history Timothy Hampton maps, the hubristic folly of Alcibiades or the all-too-human weakness of St Peter denying Christ were conceived less as uncovering particular facts about empirical individuals than as instancing general facts about human nature at large already known on higher grounds.<sup>13</sup> The epistemic value of the examples drawn from experience thus stemmed from prior acknowledgment of what French still calls *évidences*, truths endowed with the character of self-evidence. It was then “evident” from the evil end Alcibiades met, assassinated by outraged compatriots, that he had led an ignoble life, just as it was “evident” from Peter’s denial of Jesus that human frailty is capable of nothing in the absence of God’s grace. More exactly, just as we know an acorn is that entity whose nature it is to grow into an oak, so Alcibiades simply was the man his ignoble destiny showed him to have been, just as Peter simply was the man predestined to deny Christ even if he was also foreordained to become the rock on which Christ built his church.

But the evident is not evidence, least of all of the sort a genuinely empirical conception of reality deploys.<sup>14</sup> It dramatizes, clarifies, and confirms what higher authority teaches to be self-evident, quite apart from what direct experience urges. Evidence, by contrast, discloses something new, leading to findings impossible without it. The result moreover is wholly natural – not in the sense in which Aristotle would have asserted, as a logical consequence of the rational idea of what nature is, was, and ever shall be; but rather as the expression of what nature is discovered to be on the basis of empirical, and so strictly naturalistic, trial. Which means that the result will also be thoroughly contingent. As incontrovertible as it may be, what we discover by empirical means could always have been different. There is no absolute, divinely or naturally appointed reason why the world is the way we find it to be. Everything comes down to the human experience of events.

### 3. Experience, Experiment, and Experimental Selves

Early moderns knew they had selves, and learned something about what those selves were, enjoined, and permitted, because they experienced them: now in the unmediated deliverances of ordinary sensation; now as correlates of the composite body-mind they discovered themselves to be as a fact of nature and to possess in the form of person; now as the source of often disturbing urges, dreams, enthusiasms, and delusions that were as perplexing as they were undeniable. Nor, further, were these discoveries of the purely private sort that the standard reading of the testimony of Montaigne's *Essays* or of Shakespearean soliloquy encourages us to imagine. Early moderns also knew they had selves because other people assigned them in the course of everyday traffic and encounter. Selves were thus, among other things, the internalized expression of the culturally constructed identities that obliged Sganarelle to acknowledge himself to be the servant of the undeserving beneficiary of a contingent yet irresistibly coercive social hierarchy.

But early moderns knew they had selves above all because those selves turned out to be inherently experimental. In calling early modern selves experimental, I take advantage of the far wider semantic range the word enjoyed at the time than it does today. I hope thereby to convey a richer as well as more accurate sense not only of what early moderns made of experience but also of what we could. For experience as we tend to understand (and indeed experience) it today is both sharply divided and subtly diminished by preoccupation with that special mode of experience for which the institutionalization of modern science reserves the name “experiment.”



The process was well underway by the mid-seventeenth century. When Robert Boyle constructed the iconic air-pump that enabled him to adduce “matters of fact” and the law-like regularities they exhibit, the resulting experiments were just experience. Various substances were exposed to mechanical manipulation in a transparent glass receiver, and assistants worked the pump until something happened while reliable witnesses stood about to watch.<sup>15</sup> To this extent, experimental “virtuosi” like Boyle and his colleagues in the Royal Society were no different from the mechanics, clockmakers, smiths, and medical or alchemical “empirics” who had preceded them and from whom they picked up much of what they taught themselves to do.<sup>16</sup> Yet the point of such experiments was to give experience new shape and authority by causing things to occur in strict obedience to the rational protocols Boyle and his associates devised in order to discipline both the work they did and how they understood their findings.

Nor was it just a matter of avoiding the adhocery of their artisan forebears. They also evicted the cosmological fantasies of alchemists like Paracelsus or “natural magicians” like Pico, all too ready to see symbolic parallels and magic “sympathies” that preserved the at once theocentric and anthropomorphic vision of reality inherited from tradition.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, virtuosi schooled themselves to observe pure physical events explained on immanent natural grounds alone, a discipline that changed minds as well as the matters minds explored. What natural philosophers regarded as constituting genuine knowledge had accordingly been reduced to two sources: reason, which directs the search for empirical evidence and interprets the results; and direct sensory experience, which both generates and contains that evidence.

It is however already telling that the metaphysical as well as epistemological force of this reduction stemmed from the prior exclusion of a third kind of knowledge, that derived from divine revelation.<sup>18</sup> Whatever scripture or, absent the miracles scripture relates, the inner light of private faith might promise or plead, even convinced Christians like Boyle took it as axiomatic that we can only know such things as, guided by the “natural light” of reason, we contrive to grant the form of sensory observation.<sup>19</sup> As a result, the role experience plays in the search for truth had been narrowed to include only those elements that were susceptible to specifically empirical exhibition, measurement, and test. Experiments in this sense had also to be public and, in principle if not always practice, reproducible.<sup>20</sup> To count as knowledge rather than pure “subjective” reports, the experience produced in a laboratory had to be available to others in a behavioural form they could replicate for themselves. Failing to meet these twin standards, truth claims became “merely” subjective and were set aside.



A byproduct of this arrangement has been a twofold mutilation of the field of experience at large. Whole ranges of experience lose not only all authority as potential sources of insight but also whatever reality they may intrinsically possess. This process too was well underway in the seventeenth century, most visibly in the early modern doctrine of “secondary qualities.”<sup>21</sup> Our experience of such striking yet specious properties of the sensible world as colour, texture, or taste were written off as epiphenomenal side-effects of the operation of underlying “primary qualities” (number, dimension, shape, location, and states of motion or rest) alone deemed real in and of themselves as they appear in experience. We measure the magnitude of the loss when we recall the role that metaphors of colour, warmth, or savour play in ordinary assessments of what makes life worth living. But other, still more far-reaching examples include the aesthetic, moral, and teleological values we claim to find in experience as such. Judgments of beauty and ugliness, good and bad, right and wrong, the meaningful and the senseless, cease to have clear referents and so an authoritative place in accounts of what truly exists.<sup>22</sup>

The reduction of the “merely subjective” elements of experience to the status of incompletely interpreted byproducts of “objective” realities that determine them from below has had further consequences. For a start, experience in general, as distinct from the limited, putatively probative forms produced in the contrived spaces of empirical experiment, loses much of its power to teach. What cannot be given the form of a controlled experiment is simply discarded – a gesture Descartes emblematically performed in his *Discourse on the Method* of 1637. He did so first when deciding that the biographical circumstances surrounding his memorable illumination into the nature and powers of rational method had no bearing on the substance of what he learned (1.578–9). He thereby drew a sharp line between truth and what has come to be called the mere “context of discovery,” disconnecting the content of our insights from the broader social and historical factors by which they are perforce conditioned.<sup>23</sup> And he performed it again when determining that matters of personal morals could be left in a “provisional” state pending a future analysis he never in fact undertook (1.591–8).

And what is true of the directly personal forms of experience Descartes set aside in the *Discourse*, the “lived” experience German calls *Erlebnis*, is equally so of the wider, more communitarian modes to which German gives the contrasting name of *Erfahrung*.<sup>24</sup> *Erlebnis* denotes the immediate data of private experience in which empiricists like Locke found the “impressions” and “sensations” that supply the building blocks of perception-based knowledge. *Erfahrung* deepens the perspective by introducing the dimension of time inscribed in the

root verb *fahren*, meaning to travel but also to fare or undergo. While *Erlebnis* picks out the discrete instants in which experience unfolds, *Erfahrung* emphasizes the accumulation that comes with age. It incorporates not just the raw givens of day-to-day existence but how these are digested over time to form the memories, personal narratives, and practical rules of thumb that grant them the form of a life.

But *Erfahrung* introduces a social dimension as well: life becomes a feature of the sort of broader life-world Ludwig Wittgenstein has in mind in exploring the communal basis for our use of even the simplest names for things.<sup>25</sup> In this sense, the term denotes the fund of experience, passed on from person to person and one generation to the next, that we share with family, neighbours, and the culture into which we are born. Rules of thumb become proverbs, memories tales, and tales the traditions that confer the depth of *longue durée* on passing moments of time. Sganarelle's foolish talk of the bogeyman is germane here. Molière's comic servant is nothing if not an unapologetic spokesperson for the legends, superstitions, and prejudices of his caste. Yet he speaks too, by the same token, for the deeply felt canons of common decency his master flouts, and so for the common ground without which living becomes the lonely and bitter business Don Juan believes it to be.

Still, rich as it undoubtedly is, *Erfahrung* proves just as subject to reduction as colour or private circumstance. Where it is not cheapened as vulgar superstition and prejudice, it looks ad hoc and "anecdotal": an arbitrary jumble of isolated data points incapable of providing the order found in methodical reasoning or experimental matters of fact. It is just here, though, that period usage proves helpful. Early moderns were deeply engaged in reconfiguring concepts of experience and the knowledge it affords, elaborating the basic protocols of modern empirical science. But the language they used to do so retained a versatility that made room for a more nuanced and capacious sense of experience, and concomitantly of person, than the more exact idiom of our own day allows.

Though now confined to the realm of scientific experimentation, the adjective experimental described whatever pertains to experience of any sort, whether narrowly experimental in our modern sense or not. The more religiously inclined, High Anglicans and Roman Catholics as much as "enthusiastic" proponents of private revelation, could accordingly talk about the "experimental knowledge of God" understood as a direct encounter with the divine accessible to anyone attuned to it. Similarly, even as late as the high Enlightenment, the "experimental method" David Hume applied to human nature, science, aesthetic criticism, and morals encompassed experiences of every sort, down to the most intimate pangs of pleasure or pain, approval or disgust, hope, anger, or fear.

In speaking, then, of experimental persons or selves, we not only avoid the ungainly “experiential” we have had to devise in order to distinguish those forms of experience that, salient though they are, fail to meet modern experimental standards. We can reclaim the genuine epistemic value early moderns attached to even the most trivial encounters and sensations from which they composed their picture of both person and reality even as the more epistemologically daring among them drew the distinctions we now take for granted.

#### 4. Changing the Subject

Exploiting the etymological accident of the adjective’s generous semantic range in early modern use enables us to do a number of things. We can make more of the fact that a deep personal commitment to aesthetic, moral, and teleological values exceeding the level of brute materiality Thomas Hobbes or Molière’s Don Juan insist on survived even among those most busily involved in undermining those values. The empirical evidence that natural philosophers like Boyle, Isaac Newton, or Samuel Clarke adduced in defence of Christian faith was typical from this standpoint. The experimental methods employed to establish matters of fact were as rigorously naturalistic then as they are today. Yet this did not prevent people from trying to “save the appearances” for faith by claiming to find in the majestic spectacle of the natural world rational proof of the Creator’s existence secured beyond what the parallel discourse of judicial rules of evidence had just then come to call all “reasonable doubt.”<sup>26</sup> The methods they employed in their work as natural philosophers did produce increasingly demoralized findings – witness the ridicule Molière visits on poor Sganarelle’s attempt to mount the kind of proof from design Boyle or Clarke managed far more elegantly, if in the end to as little purpose. Yet we misconstrue the dynamic of period faith and feeling, and so of the period sense of person, if we look too far ahead to the disenchanted sequel.

More importantly, the notion that self was an experimental phenomenon dispels confusions that have dogged early modern studies for nearly half a century. In particular, it encourages us to rid ourselves of an idea that has been deeply entrenched in both philosophy of mind and European cultural and intellectual history since Immanuel Kant. For especially among literary and cultural historians persuaded by Continental conceptions of the springs of European modernity, we have formed the habit of explaining the authority that self and experience came to exercise in terms of the advent of the so-called modern subject: the self-disciplined and, on that basis, self-determining instrumental ego traditionally associated with Descartes.

As used by Kant, the term “subject” denotes the conscious individual just in virtue of his or her being so. It targets person as a function of awareness and everything that accompanies it: the existence of external “objects” and the mental architecture that enables consciousness to perceive, organize, and act on them; the problem of “subjectivity” that arises because of the presumed “split” by which “subject” and “object” are set more or less radically apart as a direct expression of the former’s awareness of the latter; and so too the search for “objectivity,” that orthopsychic mode of consciousness in which the “subject” may to some degree discipline and so transcend his or her self-enclosed “subjective” condition in order to grasp the “object” in its autonomy.<sup>27</sup>

The term does possess a certain utility as a kind of shorthand. If the aim is to focus on individual persons as an expression of their possession of the gift of awareness as distinguished from everything else that goes into making them what they are, then something like the word “subject” comes in handy. It is certainly to be preferred to the alternative, “consciousness,” especially in English.<sup>28</sup> In German and the Romance languages, the equivalent terms (*Bewußtsein*, *conscience*, *conoscenza*, *consienza*) come with articles, enabling people to speak of “a consciousness” and even “consciousnesses” without necessarily sounding odd. By contrast, English holds fast to the conviction that the word designates a state or condition rather than a person or thing by omitting articles and by speaking of consciousness in the plural only sparingly. In any event, given that the defining fact of human existence for Kant is consciousness, he needed a word to name the resulting entity, and “subject” (*der Subjekt*) is the one he found.

By now the term has become a shibboleth in literary and cultural studies: we use it to convey both what we are talking about and the fact that we belong to the intellectual tribe that talks that way. A working knowledge of the vocabulary of philosophy is a badge of seriousness, and since our preferred, usually Continental, philosophers use the word, literary humanists naturally follow suit. It is nevertheless worth pausing to consider how Kant came to choose the term and whether that choice was justified or helpful.

The word subject comes from the Latin *subiectum*, meaning something thrown down in offering or exchange, for discussion or observation, or as the result of some external act of coercion or “subjection.” It accordingly has many uses. In politics, it candidly denotes the coercive element in that a “subject of the Crown” or a “subject (as opposed to citizen) of the state” is immediately placed in a subaltern position of passive obedience. A similar use appears in police investigations and the natural, medical, and social sciences, where “the subject” is in fact the *object*. To be the “subject” of an experiment, a course of

treatment, or an official inquiry is to be subjected to close (and often secret) surveillance and manipulation over which one has little or no control.<sup>29</sup>

However, as the philosopher Alain de Libera observes in his recent “archaeology” of the “modern subject,” the one thing the term did not denote before Kant was an individual consciousness or agent. In philosophical usage in particular, it simply served to designate whatever it was that a philosopher happened to be talking about. As such, “subjects” came in two flavours: as what de Libera calls “subjects of inherence,” where the word singled out some entity in terms of the properties that define it as being the entity it is; or as “subjects of attribution,” where the focus falls on those properties we assign it, by, say, imputing some sacred or symbolic function or meaning to it, or by electing or appointing some person to a public office.<sup>30</sup> In either case, the “subject” was fundamentally a recipient. In claiming that some set of properties inheres to a given “subject” as defining either the “form” or “essence” that constitutes the class to which it belongs or the “accidents” that distinguish it from other members of that class, we assume that the natural processes that brought it into being endowed or implanted it with the properties in question. Meanwhile, in attributing qualities to various things or persons in terms of the public place they occupy or the role they perform in social and, more broadly, practical life, we grant them a character they did not possess before, but which nonetheless henceforth defines them in just the way natural properties do.<sup>31</sup>

All of which is to say that, before Kant, all of the properties “subjects” were said to possess, whether by inherence or attribution, and whether as being essential or accidental determinants of their identities and natures, were predicates. “The subject” was thus, at bottom, the grammatical subject of the verb, a role it plays, moreover, whether it is the agent or the patient of the action the verb describes: since I am the subject of the sentences “I hit” and “I’m hit” alike, the pronoun takes the subjective (in Latin, the nominative) case just the same.<sup>32</sup> Though the subject of a verb may well be the patient of the action described, it still takes the grammatical lead: all accompanying elements of the sentence conform to its case, number, and, in German and the Romance languages, gender. The sentence is thus shaped with systematic reference to “the subject.” Further, in I-statements, the subject of the sentence in the sense of denoting the person about whom the sentence speaks also utters that sentence. He or she becomes what Émile Benveniste taught us to call the “speaking subject,” source of the utterance in which he or she appears.<sup>33</sup> And since, in all natural languages at least, every utterance has an implicit human source, the “speaking subject” acquires the same kind of semantic range and authority as the conscious one we use the term to identify today.

It is then to considerations like these that we owe Kant's coinage. Kant set himself a double task. He had to define an object of philosophical analysis that was a "subject" in the special derivative sense his descendants have in mind. In order to be brought under scrupulous "objective" study, the "subject" had to be singled out as an entity of some sort. However, a constitutive feature of the entity so framed is that it is not just an entity like any other. And what distinguished it from all others was consciousness of its own self-governing existence. As Kant explains in his discussion of "apperception," that non-thematic yet continuous awareness of oneself that accompanies any particular moment, state, or "act" of consciousness, the fact of consciousness always calls the tune in that everything that appears or occurs to a conscious person does so as an expression of that person's conscious relation to it.<sup>34</sup> Every proposition that issues from my mouth, but also, and more fundamentally, every experience that I call my own, is thus coloured by the fact that it is precisely mine. It is a function of my awareness of it, of the standpoint in time and space in which it happens to me, and so of everything I bring to the encounter in terms of my own private interests, habits, training, character, and feeling.

The term "subject" thus does a lot of work with minimum effort. Yet, in doing so, it not only brings together notions and phenomena that might better be teased apart; the form it imposes on them creates most of the philosophical dilemmas with which philosophy of mind and epistemology continue to wrangle. Kant and his successors are right to track the problem of "the subject" back to Descartes even if he himself did not use the word this way. In particular, the problem of solipsism and the related problem of radical scepticism are largely artefacts of the way in which Descartes set about solving them. It strikes me, though, that, beyond institutionalizing what was already a mistake in Descartes, Kantian usage has deepened our difficulties. And it has done so by giving their core referent, the conscious person, a name whose multiple cognates and connotations breed confusions that compound rather than correct Descartes's misstep.

Descartes's mistake is dualism. In defining person exclusively in terms of consciousness, he locks it into the mental bubble formed both by consciousness itself, as *res cogitans*, and by the very idea that such a thing (as opposed to state or condition) might actually exist independent of our experiences of it – this indeed provides the framework for that curious shadow of self-conscious existence Kant called the "transcendental ego" in contrast to the merely "empirical" one we call our own. The two notions reinforce each other. In deciding, in the *cogito*, that the only thing I securely know about myself is the fact of "thinking" or being aware, Descartes persuades himself to think of thinking as a thing. It may be, as he insists, a thoroughly disembodied thing; but it remains a thing

just the same, floating out there somewhere, waiting to be discovered – just what he claims to have done in purporting to have hit on it as the purified residue left behind by the solvent of hyperbolic doubt. But this thing is also formed by the notion that something of the sort must exist for us to have, precisely, some notion of its existence. The thing is even arguably nothing more than that notion. Descartes thinks and, in thinking, comes across a mental entity he takes to be thinking itself. There must then be some thing out there that at once is and does this thinking rather than the activity human beings undertake when engaged in the business of forming thoughts.

That alternatives to Descartes's view were readily available is confirmed by the sets of objections that both the rationalist Hobbes and the Epicurean atomist Pierre Gassendi contributed to the volume that presented his *Meditations on First Philosophy* to the world in 1641. Hobbes argued that to call the mind a thinking thing because it thinks is as senseless as to say it is a stroll because it decides to go for a walk; and Gassendi found the notion of disembodied intelligence so patently absurd that he peppered his remarks with the mocking apostrophe *O, Spiritu!* (Oh, Mental One; Oh, Spirit) to remind his correspondent of the shared empirical embodiment implied by the mere fact of exchanging opinions.<sup>35</sup>

Yet the best response before Locke's critique in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* of 1690 was the one Baruch Spinoza formulated in the *Ethics* of 1677, in large part because Spinoza was, in other respects, an unusually sympathetic reader, especially on the score of Descartes's assertion of the primacy of pure reason over the perplexed (and perplexing) vagaries of sense. If Spinoza challenged dualism, it was on the strictly rational grounds that to assume consciousness was of a substance different from that of "extended" forms like the human body was to claim that there could in fact be two substances in the world – a notion he took to be a contradiction in terms. For a "substance" is properly something wholly unconditioned by anything else, a criterion violated as soon as more than one of them exist if only because each one must limit (and so condition) the other.<sup>36</sup>

But, true to the logical consequences of his monistic picture of the essential unity of all natural beings, Spinoza went further. Not only did he portray the mind as inseparable from the body; he showed it to be nothing more than "an idea of the body" as such. In doing so, he deployed a double genitive that defined mind both as something revealed to us in the form of awareness of our own bodily states and as an immanent product of those very states themselves. We first discover mind in the form of the conscious hurts, pleasures, appetites, and frustrations occasioned by our physical engagement in an equally physical world. We as it were come to mind in the process of taking account of the things



we encounter about us as a function of the ways in which those things make us feel – happy or angry, fearful or galvanized by need. Mind is thus an idea about the body that also belongs to it as an expression of the kind of body it is and of its interactions with other bodies in the natural world.<sup>37</sup> Descartes therefore mistakes the experience of the body in Spinoza's dual sense for something else. But what is this if not, precisely, his notion of the thing rather than some other thing entirely: the thing that is not a thing; the thing he calls mind?

Descartes's mistake gets worse, however, the moment mind as he defined it becomes "a subject." In the first place, as noted a moment ago, it encourages us to think of self as a more or less passive recipient of whatever predicates we choose to assign it. This as it were categorical passivity underpins and legitimizes Louis Althusser's theory of "interpellation." Identity, in his view, is determined – even if not especially for "the subject" itself – by the way in which the prevailing order defines it by giving it a "proper" name. Self is then what those who have the power to do so call it in the "Hey, you!" that Althusser takes to be the core modality of social relation.<sup>38</sup> True, as the example of Sganarelle already suggests, self is indeed, among many other things, the bearer of social identities of this sort. Sganarelle is a servant because that is the role into which society calls him, a role to which he is obliged to conform if only to avoid the beatings of which he complains. But of course he does complain. Further, in defending the irreducible dignity attached to all human beings as such, he demands that his master recognize him as a person independent of his identity as a servant. Insofar as the term "subject" casts its referent in an unavoidably (if often inadvertently) passive light, its use prejudices a wide range of issues by narrowing the range of questions we can ask, and so the range of experiments that not only can be but, in the early modern period, were actively performed.

We see a similar narrowing of semantic angles of attack in the related concept of "subjectivity," whose presence in the language is all the deeper in that virtually everyone uses it even if they have never heard of "subjects" in Kant's sense.<sup>39</sup> "Subjectivity" is the name we give the condition or state of being "a subject." It emerges then as part of the attempt to work out what the intrinsic properties of that condition or state might be: self-awareness; or the fact of seeing the world always and only from some definite standpoint or position; or existence as a psycho-physical interior distinct from the external realities to which it nonetheless relates. But this already suggests that a categorical feature of being "a subject" is to be "subjective," and thus cut off from "subjectivity's" parasitic twin in the kind of "objectivity" needed to form an accurate picture of reality by the very nature of the psycho-physical activity through which "the subject" tries to master its world.<sup>40</sup>



This vision is darkened further by semantic drift. No matter how precise philosophical use of the term may be, it is hard, and often impossible, to prevent its various senses from bleeding into one another – in many instances cross-contamination is even taken to be a positive virtue. Perhaps the most egregious example is Jacques Lacan, who makes an unstated yet nonetheless strategic point of shifting between different senses of the term “subject” without warning, on the tacit (and wholly untested) assumption that they all amount to the same thing. At any given moment, the word may accordingly denote many different and even contrasting phenomena. Lacan frequently uses it as a synonym for consciousness. In other places it designates *a* consciousness in the sense of a conscious individual. Moreover, in keeping with his experience as a practicing psychoanalyst writing up case histories, he also uses it as a term for a patient or a target of experimental trial. Given the foundational role he assigned language in determining the shape of both conscious and unconscious life, “subject” also often refers to a grammatical function as the seat of first-person ideation or report. When, in grander moments, Lacan undertakes the critique of Western philosophy of mind as a whole, the term becomes a philosophical concept, identified with the historical formation that produced the “optical” self of so-called classical, Cartesian psychology. Nor do any of these uses preclude any of the others: on the contrary, they can be yoked together to form any combination you choose. Part of the point Lacan sets out to make in this way is that “the subject,” however understood, is in any case never more than an effect of the signifiers used to denote it. Artful slippage from one register to another at the turn of a phrase appears therefore to reveal something fundamental and deep even if the actual result is preening confusion. For, in the absence of scrupulous conceptual analysis or test, semantic slippage literally does all the work. The fact that the one term, “subject,” can denote any or all of these things simultaneously is itself all the proof Lacan needs, or gives.

More common though, and closer to my early modern home, is the merging of philosophical and political uses of the word in discussions of human “governmentality.”<sup>41</sup> The subject as a centre or site of conscious activity (S1) is thus readily identified paronomastically, by mere wordplay, as a political subject (S2). This makes it possible to redefine the inner discipline needed to escape the condition of private “subjectivity” in pursuit of the “objectivity” required for successful agency. The effort to get at the truth of things is transformed into an automatized reflex of the subject’s internalization of the external Law imposed by society, the culture, or the reigning discourse of the moment. The process of becoming a subject in sense S1 is accordingly regarded as entailing subjection in the form of a subject in sense S2.

Conversely, to become a normatively “good,” that is governable subject (S2) demands turning oneself into a normatively “good,” that is well-ordered and right-thinking subject (S1). The private orthopsychic effort to think straight, see clearly, and do right is reduced to subservience to those larger, trans- and so impersonal social forces that dictate what constitutes straight thought, clearheadedness, and rightness in the first place. Subjectivity amounts to subjugation, and all the more irresistibly in that it proceeds through the subject’s self-subjugation by internal conformity to what the prevailing social order has decreed to be the disciplinary *habitus* of successful conduct, identity, and belief.<sup>42</sup>

This is of course all punning. Nor is that necessarily a bad thing: the title of this introduction reveals my own affection for the trope. Yet, as with all figures of speech, puns like this owe their power to a capacity to persuade independent of whatever foundation they may have in actual experience. Witness the fact that no one feels the need to test the identifications established in this way by subjecting them (save the word!) to careful logical analysis. As in Lacan, the punning does all the work, carrying the full authority of conceptual demonstration without offering any. True, having created the impression of a relation of homology between conscious and political subjects, we go on to find evidence in the form of all of those features of empirical experience the related terms appear to make new sense of. But the reading is circular: the supporting evidence arises as a back-formation of premises that escape painstaking trial. Rather than begin with the deeds, artefacts, and events we wish to explain, we begin with the equation the pun inspires:  $S1 = S2$ .

The temptation to take puns for real concepts, and so for real things, is reinforced by another feature of linguistic usage: the unwary use of definite articles that Wittgenstein and J.L. Austin warn about.<sup>43</sup> Even in English, where articles are never as mandatory as in other languages, insofar as the term “subject” designates any “subject,” it invites us to use it to identify each one in terms of what they have in common, namely the fact of being “a subject.” But what more exactly do “subjects” so defined have in common if not participation in the general form we proceed to call “*the* subject”?

This train of thought breeds a strange hybrid that is at once a separate individual and the embodiment of a class – and even, pushing further, an embodiment of that class just in virtue of being an individual.<sup>44</sup> The class then comes to exhibit the character of an individual and the individual that of the class. On one side, it appears as though there can in fact be no individual except insofar as he or she conforms to overarching type. But since, historically, sociologically, and empirically, the world is populated by historical, social, and empirical individuals, the set of types proliferates. Kantian subject-talk has thus spawned a whole

range of hybrid creatures whose reality is vouched for by the way philosophical usage enables us to name them: “the subject” of course, but also “the modern” and “post-modern subject,” followed quickly and remorselessly by “the subject of psychoanalysis,” of “history,” of “science,” of “civility,” of “childhood,” of “liberty,” of “gender,” of “love,” and so on to infinity. Each of these verbal formations has a certain appeal, especially when projected against the background of the  $S1 = S2$  equation. As applied, for instance, to the study of Renaissance courtesy books, the “subject of civility” can seem especially promising, involving as it does notions of dressage and Greenblattian self-fashioning.<sup>45</sup> But it is a question whether, in using it, we gain more in the way of eye-catching salience than we lose in close-grained social or historical detail.

To which I would add one further point: the essential emptiness of the abstract noun we employ to identify the quality or character of “subjectivity” that all “subjects” are presumed to share. It is already telling that we do not generally use the word and its adjectival consort to describe “subjects” or persons themselves – under what circumstances would we find ourselves calling some woman, man, or child “subjective”? We reserve the term rather for their perceptions, assumptions, judgments, or states of mind. But what, if anything, does use of the term contribute beyond indicating that a given perception or judgment is somehow coloured, skewed, distorted, or befogged by an otherwise unnamed personal element capable of taking an almost infinite variety of distinctly different forms? One may, for instance, be blinded by prejudice, seduced by self-interest, driven by fear, overcome by emotion, or possessed by some inner demon. Terming such occurrences “subjective” says nothing that is not already more perspicuously said by calling a spade a spade. Worse, by encouraging us to adduce such things as evidence of an underlying condition, “subjectivity,” that is not only endemic to the species but an implicitly pathological deviation from an “objective” norm that is itself parasitic on the condition it claims to cure, we lose sight of their corrigibility. Even in the twenty-first century of talk radio and Twitter, people do occasionally awake from dogmatic slumber when confronted with the errors they commit and the facts that prove them wrong.

All of which begs the question: is Kant’s term appropriate to the early modern world at all? For, as de Libera’s archaeology reminds us, whatever else early modern persons may have been, and however closely some of them espoused Descartes’s portrayal of conscious being, they were not “subjects” in our current philosophical sense of the word. They were, to be sure, political subjects, schooled in obedience to the prevailing forms of political and religious authority the age presented. Yet if there was anything their experience as conscious beings taught them, it was not only the increasingly outspoken right to think for themselves but the fact that they already did so. Where then use of the term

“subject” encourages us to see them, paronomastically, as self-subjugating prisoners of the very activities in which they exercised their independent powers of perception, observation, judgment, and experiment, abandoning that usage enables us to explore the available evidence with fresh eyes.<sup>46</sup>

## 5. Dimensions of Self and Early Modern Persons

Ridding ourselves of “the subject” as the term used to denote what early moderns tended to call person may thus relieve us of the temptation to see them as prisoners of their own self-subjugating ideas about self, world, and the relation between them. Early moderns worried about these things. They knew as well as we the risk of radical alienation from the world, other people, and ourselves. Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* (1615) gives us a vivid picture of the disease, and Shakespeare’s exploration of the “green-eyed monster” of sexual jealousy in *Othello* (1603) another. But as these examples already hint, the forms of alienation experienced in madness or jealousy were not simply internal matters, real as the inner suffering involved might be. They were also matters of public import and comment in that they produced clearly detectible public symptoms and behaviour that affected other people and disturbed communal order.

Madness and jealousy occur not only inside one’s own head (“O full of scorpions is my mind!”) but in the world: they are indeed, among other things, ways of *being* in the world and, as such, make things happen there. This is one of the deepest insights informing Cervantes’s management of the delusions of Don Quixote. For not only does the benighted hidalgo think crazy things; he does them; and what he does has the habit of making other people do things that are arguably just as crazy as anything he undertakes. Thus the Bachelor Carrasco takes on the persona of the Knight of the Mirrors, donning the costume, forms of speech, and haughty demeanour of a *caballero* of romance in order to hunt Don Quixote down to cure his disease by defeating him in knightly combat. In a politically more pointed vein, a characteristic byproduct of the paternal *idée fixe* in Moliéresque comedy is the way it bends family life out of shape by compelling other members of the household to conform to the distortions of perception and moral feeling incident to the father’s piety, avarice, or hypochondria. It is not just that, in his monomaniacal pursuit of personal salvation, the Orgon of *Tartuffe* (1669) cannot tell the difference between true devotion and hypocrisy. He imposes his will, and so delusion, on everyone else, to the point of getting them all evicted from their home, left penniless in the street.

Early modern portrayals of madness and jealousy underscore the important point Jerrold Seigel makes in *The Idea of the Self*. Looked at closely, self

is a three- and even four-dimensional phenomenon.<sup>47</sup> There is the inner being, whether defined as mind, consciousness, character, or personality, together with the perceptions, volitions, and feelings it experiences and the ideas it entertains as a function of its internal life. There is also the body, complete with senses and material needs, biological urges, powers, and limits. But there is further, and capitably, the dimension of social relation: the fact that human beings are not just minds or bodies, or even body-minds of a Hobbesian or Spinozan cast, but members of families and communities in which they engage not only with an external environment but with others of their kind. And then there is the element of time: the fact that we live, grow, mature, and die in a world that changes as we do.

Different people weight these dimensions differently, and do so differently at different times: Descartes paid closer attention to the claims of bodily experience late in life than in early maturity.<sup>48</sup> A signal virtue of Seigel's book is the way it documents the impact such differences have had on how various British, French, and German thinkers from Descartes, Locke, and Leibniz to Heidegger, Derrida, and Foucault have pictured self. But the crucial insight is that, whatever the relative weightings, and however adamantly a given commentator may insist on the centrality of one or another of these terms, self has never been unilaterally determined by any one of them. It has instead arisen as the theatre and nexus of the evolving interactions between them. Self is the experience of mind, body, and social relation over time. And the medium of that experience is deepening encounter not only with oneself but with other selves, and thus with the self as made known to us through other selves – as seen through eyes other than our own.

Thus, when pressed to come up with a word for self as a general concept, where it was not something like Pascal's thinglike *moi*, the term early moderns hit on was person.

Like the term subject, person plays on a number of registers. The OED gives nine main definitions, the second of which ("a human being") further subdivides to include eight distinct uses. The word's versatility explains why early moderns generally preferred it to the related notion of self with which it might otherwise be conflated.<sup>49</sup> The sense of self does of course colour many occurrences of the word person since active and articulate self-awareness was (and is) seen to distinguish human beings from other animals. The sense of self is moreover closely tied to person's use to denote conscious inwardness, one's private, "inner" self: what we are in ourselves, truly and sincerely, even when the individual so experienced is full of evasions, hesitations, and lies.

This use of the term is reflected in the third of the OED's general definitions: "The self, being, or individual personality of a man or woman, esp. as

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distinct from his or her occupation, works, etc.” The importance of the distinction the OED stresses here bears closely on Sganarelle’s heated response to his master’s misanthropy. In defending the Piconian dignity he shares with all human beings, no matter how lowly and inconsequential, Sganarelle asserts his personal self-worth as being something more than and sharply different from his assigned role as Don Juan’s clownish servant. But this in turn underscores self’s fundamentally reflexive character. Sganarelle is after all driven to affirm his sense of personal identity and worth by his master’s callousness. A similar rebound supplies the structure for the fragment (Sellier 567) in which Pascal most fully formulates his picture of *le moi* by giving it the form of the question (“Qu’est-ce que le moi?”) mentioned earlier: a question prompted by disappointment at discovering that other people do not love us in the way we want them to – for instance, even following an attack of smallpox that disfigures our faces or a stroke that destroys our mental faculties.<sup>50</sup> Self is accordingly a point to which we return in reaction to our multiform engagement in the outer world, and even with ourselves in our capacity as outwardly directed beings responding to the obstacles and hurts encountered in daily life.

To be a person in the sense of being or having a self is thus a kind of double-take, arising when we step back from the world and the part we play in it. Self’s reflexive character relates to the notion’s deep connection to dramatic soliloquy. Person in this sense is a way of withdrawing from the course of events in order to speak out in self-discovery as an expression of one’s irreducible singularity. It is in this light that person comes to be identified with the settled sense of psychological continuity that has preoccupied English-language philosophy since Locke’s analysis of the role memory plays in securing personal identity over time. The Lockean settlement was soon deranged by Hume’s picture of self as a random bundle of impressions, sentiments, and ideas deprived of stable unity of any clearly demonstrable sort. Nevertheless, in Bernard Williams, Derek Parfit, or Hilary Putnam, the analytic tradition continues to pose the problem of person as revolving around the question of whether or not, as Parfit puts it, self is some separate, deeper, and enduring fact impervious to the freaks of psychological accident and change. Even when under sceptical attack of the kind Hume and Parfit launch, person is a matter of immediate inner experience as deeply felt and inherently private as it may be unstable and unreal.<sup>51</sup>

But beyond designating what one is as a matter of inner nature or a more or less illusory sense of psychic continuity, person refers to the body.<sup>52</sup> It is already revealing that when we say that someone is a “good” or “bad” or a “nice” or “troublesome” person, we refer not only to the kind of person he or she is as a matter of inner character but to their quasi-physical impact on those around

them. It is in this same general sense that we may lay hands on someone's person or describe someone as having a "pretty" or "prepossessing" person. Person is thus the bodily as well as the inner or moral being. Such is what the narrator of Marie-Madeleine Pioche de La Vergne, comtesse de Lafayette's *Princesse de Clèves* (1678) has in mind when the *reine dauphine* commands that a series of miniature portraits be painted of "all of the beautiful persons at court," meaning in the first instance those who looked good to the exclusion of those who failed to.<sup>53</sup>

But looking good or bad is not merely a matter of possessing the kind of physical attributes a given community identifies as "personable" or attractive, important though this is. It is also a matter of demeanour, deportment, and the care one takes over one's physical appearance in terms of hygiene, dress, or cosmetics. What Lafayette's novel calls *une belle personne* includes then the way in which a given person presents him or herself to others in public as well as intimate gatherings. The physical person is already a social being at the intersection of inner and outer appearance and behaviour, and so at the point of contact between what one is in and for oneself and how others perceive us. It is in fact both inner and outer at once and indissociably. This in turn sheds light on the fact that when someone lays hands on someone else's person by seizing or slapping it, it is experienced not only as an act of direct physical violence but as a violation of one's simultaneously public and private identity. A slap is an affront as well as an injury, an invasion of a private space that is also a public possession and a public right: a fact all the more powerfully felt in an often punitively hierarchical social order like that of early modernity, where social superiors enjoyed the privilege of striking those over whom they lorded – children, wives, servants, peasants, and even artisans or merchants.<sup>54</sup>

The matter of right relates to another circumstance to which Lafayette's novel draws attention: the degree to which the word person serves as an honorific, a fact already detected in the OED definition of person as "a human being." As we will see in [chapter 6](#), when we take up the *Princesse* at length, not everyone in Lafayette's world gets to be called a person. Servants, notably, are invariably referred to as *nos gens*, those nameless people who facelessly attend to the main characters' needs and wishes. To be a person here accordingly demands having an acknowledged social as well as moral stature, drawing just the kind of invidious distinction Sganarelle resents in token of the ever-broadening sense of who counts as a full-blown human being. In another literary work to which we will turn later, Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fayre* (1614), the promiscuous mixing of persons of widely contrasting social standing in a street market not only degrades the upper-caste people in attendance by subjecting them to the



levelling impact of the process of monetary exchange. It also, and correlatively, imbues their lower-caste companions with a sharply drawn visibility that challenges presumptions of the sort Lafayette takes for granted.

Etymology further underscores person's status as a public as well as private identity – as in fact both at once. As Hobbes reminds us, the word originates in the Latin *persona*, itself derived from the Greek *prosopon*, meaning the mask a stage actor held before his face to make his character legible to the audience.<sup>55</sup> Person is thus intimately connected to the idea of playing a part: a commonplace of period courtesy manuals that admonished neophytes to be mindful of the “personage” appropriate to the station in which they found themselves at court.<sup>56</sup> There is also the word's forensic use and the way this folded back into the sense of person at large. Locke provides the *locus classicus* in this context, defining person not only as the fruit of private memory but as someone capable of assuming public, and so legal, responsibility for his or her actions.<sup>57</sup> Children, idiots, or the mad were not in his view properly persons in that they were unable to enter into binding contracts and could not be held legally liable for deeds that, in the ordinary way, would be regarded as torts or crimes.

And to Locke's pregnant application of the categories of the common law to defining person should be added Hobbes's use of the term in *Leviathan's* (1651) analysis of political authority (111–15). Hobbes aims to identify who has the right of sovereign decision in the state, urging that there can be only one sovereign to whom all citizens or subjects delegate their private right of self-government in order to secure peace. To do so, he analyses the phenomenon of political personation. In the bleak description of the “state of nature” depicting the horrors that attend the lack of sovereign authority, Hobbes sees each person (if such a thing could be said to exist in that state) as exercising sovereign sway over his or her own actions. The result is the notorious “war of everyman against everyman” he takes to characterize the natural human condition. Whence what the Weimar-era German jurist Carl Schmitt calls the mysterious (and historically untraceable) “spark of reason” in which a coherent political community spontaneously forms when its members designate some one of their number as sovereign over all others.<sup>58</sup> But the sovereign so defined is not simply that private individual in whom the community invests sovereign authority: he or she is the community *in person*, that is, as the plenipotentiary representative entitled to decide on everyone's behalf.

Hobbes's political person has complex roots. It draws, for example, on the labours of medieval canon and civil lawyers, famously chronicled in a book we will return to in later chapters, Ernst Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies*, to define the legal status of forms of corporate identity (a guild, a state, a university, the Church) and the way these were made manifest in the persons of



duly appointed representatives. Hobbes's theory of political personation also tacitly draws on person's use in Christian theology, where it stands for each of the three hypostases of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>59</sup> To be sure, as both Hobbes and his medieval predecessors understood, person in this sense is a legal fiction, not least because, though the sovereign decides, the legal "author" of the decisions he or she makes is the people he or she personates (114). Still, the more general sense of person that underwrites the fiction shows it to be a model for person as such. To be a person is to be one's own plenipotentiary, and so to represent oneself in the world as the responsible author of one's words, actions, and choices. And the theological implication of a sense of hypostatic union behind a multiplicity of distinct manifestations or avatars deepens the formal dignity bestowed in this way.

The combined notions of public authority and hypostatic union shed fresh light on the moral value attached to one's person even in a physical sense: what gives us the right as well as the natural propensity to resent slaps, slights, and insults. Which is why in the period – even if not especially, as Hélène Merlin-Kajman argues, in absolutist France – the notion of sovereignty technically reserved for the monarch increasingly shaped the picture of person in general, reaching as far down the social ladder as Molière's Sganarelle, offended as well as frightened by his master's cynical misanthropy.<sup>60</sup> Hobbes is adamant: there is, and can be, only one sovereign; for the moment there are two, as in a state like the civil-war England of *Behemoth* (1668), where religious factions felt empowered to resist monarchic authority by alleging the higher authority of God, there is no sovereign at all. Yet the logic that led him to portray the sovereign as a person still illustrates the direction in which the underlying phenomenon of personhood was experienced, and so evolved.

## 6. Early Modern Persons and the Experiment of Self

In joining early moderns in using the word person as the term of choice for what we tend today to call "subject" or self, we gain a clearer grasp of the multidimensional sense of human individuals they entertained even when, in Shakespearean soliloquy or Cartesian meditation, their gazes appeared to turn most acutely inward. But we also equip ourselves to read the texts and images they produced more fully by seeing in them the, in every sense, experimental happenings they were.

We return to Sganarelle's botched defence of the dignity attached to even so paltry a creature as himself. The exchange opens with a catechism: reminded of doctrine by his doctor's robe, Sganarelle quizzes his master in order to elicit what are supposed to be rote responses. The quiz initiates a series of tests to

which both characters are put. Don Juan refuses to give the answers Sganarelle expects, driving his servant to a proof of God's existence from design that leads nowhere. The world may not have sprung up overnight like a mushroom, and the human body may well be composed of many ingenious "contrivances." Yet the only evidence that could help decide how the world came to be is furnished by the world itself in its natural facticity; and however ingenious they may be, the very contrivances that bespeak the human body's powers show it to be a machine. The result is Sganarelle's dismay at the underlying moral implications: if all we have is our body, and that body is a machine, what value do we possess beyond the sheer fact of material existence? He responds by citing the faculties of thought and free will. But this too must be tested, and the result is the dance that lands him on his nose. At which point Don Juan changes the subject, observing that "while reasoning, I believe we have lost our way," introducing the scene at the crossroads where he attempts to persuade the beggar they approach for directions to blaspheme in exchange for a gold sovereign (876).

Even this account does not exhaust the scene's lessons. Sganarelle is defeated: Don Juan's atheism prevails. Nor will the latter's descent to Hell in the denouement, complete with flashes of lightning and peals of thunder, change that fact. For of course this is all playacting and nobody goes anywhere. Yet things change just the same. Though he fails to defend it, Sganarelle discovers "something or other" in his head he is unwilling to part with. And his master brings himself, all unawares and yet in full view of the audience, to a moment of decision, a moment of truth. For the meeting with the beggar is the first of three scenes in which Don Juan might have saved his immortal soul: when, against all appearances, the beggar refuses to blaspheme, performing what looks like an act of simple piety; when, having rescued his armed pursuers from bandits in the woods and received in return a day in which to satisfy their demands, Don Juan refuses to honour the promise of marriage to their sister; and when confronted with the evidence of the murdered commander's animated statue, a "miracle" in which Don Juan testily insists he sees a mere trick of atmospheric light. Covering the central portions of act three, where neoclassical dramaturgy placed the fulcrum of events destined to a tragic end, these scenes seal Don Juan's fate – but only because he is publicly shown to choose the damnation to which legend predestines him, thereby convicting himself of the villainy that damns his soul.

We find ourselves then in an experimental space, as witnesses to a series of empirical manipulations and the events they make happen. True, these are pseudo-events. This is still only playacting, and Don Juan chooses nothing: the actor in the role merely recites his lines. And yet something real has happened all the same. The true experiment consists less of what purports to take place onstage

than of the effect it produces in the audience: how we take up what we see and hear, the emotions we feel, the novel (and disturbing) ideas we are led to entertain. Something has happened, and changed; and the outcome tells us something we had not known before, if only about our own emotions and characters.

But what is true of Molière's *Don Juan* proves equally so of early modern artworks generally, especially when we give the word art its original sense, as denoting less the high-minded aesthetic fictions of post-Kantian theory than the productions of human artifice at large, whatever shape they take. To compose a poem, paint a picture, publish a treatise, fashion an argument, or put on a play is to frame an experience for the readers, beholders, scholars, disputants, and theatre-goers to whom they are addressed. The upshot – just what and how all of these people experience the work set before them – will be decided by the event: as in Boyle's experiments with his air-pump, the result cannot be pre-determined, however shrewdly the outcome may be guessed. But, more than that, the experience brought about by these means goes on to produce effects of its own. To sit through *Don Juan*, read Descartes's *Meditations*, or watch the closely monitored rise of mercury in a tube set in the glass receiver attached to Boyle's air-pump is to be changed in ways that both reveal new facts about self and world unobserved before and alter those facts by subjecting them to the manipulations required to bring them to light. What is more, the facts illuminated in this way provoke further changes still as we weigh them not only in our minds but in the world of practical affairs we share with others – and nowhere more incontrovertibly than when the subject in question takes the form of a person. For, as early moderns increasingly discovered, person too is an experiment, a precipitate of the processes of trial and error through which it comes to know itself.

## 7. Outline of the Book

The following chapters put the notion of experimental selves to the test through a series of case studies drawn from a wide variety of cultural and disciplinary contexts.

The first two chapters fill out the picture of the early modern experiment of person from the standpoint of its relation to epistemology. [Chapter 1](#), “The Shape of Knowledge: The Culture of Experiment and the Byways of Expression,” focuses on the experiment's consequences for the pursuit of knowledge and the corresponding impact changes in knowledge had on the experience of self. In elaborating what remain the basic protocols of modern experimental science by incorporating the forms in which embodied persons actively acquire such knowledge as they possess, Boyle gave the inductive program championed in

Bacon's *New Organon* (1620) the practical means that had eluded his great predecessor. However, as Barbara Shapiro noted some time ago, Boyle's practice of natural science also deeply modified Bacon's model. In particular, the successes it achieved paradoxically persuaded its adepts to abandon the quest for absolute certainty enshrined in the basic notion of knowledge itself from antiquity down to the early modern era.<sup>61</sup>

A first outcome was what Ian Hacking has described as the shift from a representational theory of knowledge to one grounded in practical intervention.<sup>62</sup> Where the aim had been to grant the sprawl of natural experience the systematic coherence of the kind of universal spectacle the rationalist Descartes still felt demanded of him in his early *Treatise on the World* (1630; published posthumously in 1677), intellectual mastery of reality increasingly came to be seen as a mode of empirical work, a direct physical as well as mental engagement with the world in its material autonomy. We accordingly witness the emergence of what Shapiro calls a "culture of fact" in which propositions came to be tested against forms of evidence that were deliberately produced by artificial means.

The result however was not merely the emergence of the kind of heartless instrumental mastery in which commentators like Theodor Adorno, Charles Taylor, or Giorgio Agamben lament the roots of modern Western alienation from self and world alike.<sup>63</sup> Nor was it what we have come to think of as "subjective" imprisonment in thought-worlds of our own making.

One of my aims here is to extend and refine the insights achieved since the 1990s by the at once empirically rich and theoretically sophisticated exploration of the social and cultural contexts of early modern art, thought, and writing: an enterprise typified by the history of early modern science in Paolo Rossi, Lorraine Daston, Katherine Parker, and Steven Shapin as well as in writers I have already cited like Hacking, Shapiro, and Dear. It will be obvious how deeply I am in their debt. Yet the very successes these scholars score have also generated confusion by creating the impression that period culture cut its inhabitants off from the bedrock realities early modern poets, painters, and virtuosi imagined they had uncovered – that early moderns were in fact sleepwalkers guided by the evil genius of ideology and by underlying material imperatives they were unable to recognize or control. Over against this view, I argue in this chapter that early modern experimental science in particular was a mode of dialectical interaction in which, precisely because the persons involved were experimental beings of the sort my introduction portrays, self and world at once defined and shaped each other to an effect bilaterally expressive of both. Understanding the world thus involves understanding ourselves – not however in Cartesian wise, as something fundamentally separate from the order of physical nature, but rather as a telltale natural expression of the world we seek to comprehend.

To develop a sharper picture of the bilaterally expressive character of the world as early moderns learned to perceive it, we turn in the next chapter to the evidence supplied by visual art. [Chapter 2](#), “The Art of the Inside Out: Vision and Expression in Hoogstraten’s London *Peepshow*,” recalls the close collaboration between painting and science, especially (though by no means exclusively) in the mercantile north. Of special relevance is the quasi-Baconian “art of describing” that Svetlana Alpers memorably discerns in the landscapes, street scenes, genre vignettes, and architectural paintings of the Dutch Golden Age. Seventeenth-century Dutch descriptiveness was not just a matter of the unparalleled realism Dutch painters brought to depicting the world in which they lived in terms of the subjects they chose to paint and the techniques they used to paint them. They adopted a philosophy of art that Alpers rightly links to the visual program formulated by Boyle’s associate Robert Hooke in the preface to his *Micrographia* of 1665, a collection of densely annotated engravings illustrating the wonders seen through a microscope. In Hooke’s words, the goal was to conjoin the “sincere eye” of exact scientific observation with the “faithful hand” of artistic representation to produce a precise encyclopedic map of the visible world.<sup>64</sup> In pursuing this goal, moreover, Dutch painters engaged in ingenious experiments with the most up-to-date visual technologies of the day, including trompe-l’œil composition, catoptric and dioptric lenses, and *camerae obscurae* – all of it perhaps most vividly on display in the perspective boxes of Rembrandt’s sometime pupil, the peripatetic polymath Samuel van Hoogstraten.

The chapter centres on detailed analysis of the Hoogstraten *Peepshow* of c. 1655–60, a box in the National Gallery in London. By compelling the beholder to peer into the box’s concealed interior along narrowly focused sightlines fixed in two of its corners, Hoogstraten creates remarkable effects of intricately interlocking three-dimensional spaces. Further, because it is a box rather than a panel or canvas, the pictures it contains mimic not only the external world as accessible to natural vision but the mental work of vision itself – the processes by which the brain converts what contemporary optics had already shown to be the reversed two-dimensional images that strike the retina into coherent reproductions of the upright three-dimensional objects from which mediating light rays carry them. The box thereby models the generation of the “ideas” lodged in our heads that period psychology took to be the real as opposed to apparent objects of our perceptions. Looking inside the box becomes quite literally a matter of peering into one’s own brain in order to observe not merely the resemblance between the things we see and artful representations of them but their functional identity.

But does this mean, as sceptics might observe, that vision is essentially an illusion, as tenuous and misleading as those associated with art itself? Hoogstraten

suggests that it does not by decorating the outside of the box with allegorical scenes portraying the roots of art in the figure of Eros, god of the desire for Love, Fame, and Fortune that spurs artists and natural philosophers alike. As complexly mediated as experience of the box may show the bond between mind and world to be, the erotics of vision, art, and science remind us that the world is nonetheless palpably there as the correlate of the appetites that urge us on. And these appetites in turn confirm our own embodied reality as creatures defined by insatiable want and need, and capable of the physical as well as mental work required to satisfy them. The trick is to think of the relation in the specifically expressive terms that Spinoza's *Ethics* deploys. The world as we perceive it – the only one we know – is the simultaneous expression of the things that we desire and of desire itself. As the proverb says, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. But, as attested by Dutch predilection for what Harry Berger calls still-life “snackscapes” composed of edibles of every kind, the obverse is just as true: the reality of eating is affirmed in the mouth-watering presence of the meats, breads, cheeses, and fruit Dutch art abundantly portrays.<sup>65</sup> Vision and world form a chiasmic knot whose pervasive recurrence in Dutch painting deepens our grasp of the forms experience took in everyday life as well as science or art.

Chapter 3, “Persons and Portraits: The Vicissitudes of Burckhardt's Individual,” turns to the problem of the art of portraiture. Ever since Jacob Burckhardt's path-breaking work in the nineteenth century, we have associated the advent of early modern persons with the immense outpouring of portraits of every kind witnessed from the fifteenth century on. Burckhardt defined the new cultural personage that emerged as the “individual,” a nineteenth-century construct shaped by two related contrasts: that between each individual and every other, and that between the individual and “the mass.” Dating from the Renaissance, persons like those depicted in portraits stood out both in their own minutely characterized singularity and from the great undifferentiated crowds of lesser mortals. The result was the distinctively nineteenth-century tension canonized in Burckhardt's sometime junior colleague Friedrich Nietzsche's portrayal of the *Übermensch*: the superior being set in lonely isolation from the resentful mob of those too weak to achieve genuine autonomy.<sup>66</sup>

However, even in Burckhardt, the new-minted individual he symptomatically identified above all with the Renaissance prince was a fundamentally relational creature. As Burckhardt saw, and as Niccolò Machiavelli taught in a lesson that his exact contemporary, Castiglione, extended to the figure of the courtier, the prince could only be understood against the background of the emergent Renaissance state: a state conceived, moreover, as what Burckhardt expressly termed a “work of art,” something made by human hands that could as such always be challenged, rethought, and so remade as an expression of

empirical events. The Renaissance individual was therefore from the outset the sort of experiment I have described here – the more so given the role both Machiavelli and Castiglione assign to the at once princely and courtly work of self-fashioning in which all concerned engaged.

But this in turn made Renaissance individuals artworks as open to empirically driven challenge, rethinking, and reshaping as the state that gave them birth. The result was the deepest testimony of the portraits that have preserved their likenesses. For, as Richard Brilliant and Harry Berger have shown, portraits were both expressions of and templates for the persons they portrayed: forms of often highly theatricalized self-presentation in which people tried to become the kinds of person the experience of other people's portraits modelled for them.<sup>67</sup> Further, the experiment of self-presentation reenacted the existential vicissitudes to which civic life exposed them. A form of life in the public eye, portraiture unfolded not only under the keenly observant gazes of others but also as the product of the manual as well as ideal labour of another new class of human being: the Renaissance painters who, like Boyle's associate Hooke or the canny ministers who increasingly took up the burden of governance on their princely masters' behalf, actually performed the experiment.

The autarchic individual whose Renaissance birth Burckhardt celebrates thus turns out to be something richer and more complex. In the images of themselves that a growing variety of early modern persons commissioned to project their identities into the public world, princes, soldiers, and courtiers, but also merchants, ladies, preachers, and scholars revealed at once the hard-earned sources of pride and the indelible character flaws that made them the four-dimensional creatures that they were. As the pragmatist C.S. Peirce might have put it, sitting for a portrait, like any other act of public self-presentation, both parades and betrays one's character.<sup>68</sup> For like the persons they depict, portraits are the work not only of those who pose for them but above all of those who perceive and render an authenticating likeness. Just as portraits must be recognized as such to become the kind of images they are, so persons only exist as correlates of the work of public encounter, inspection, and judgment others perform on their behalf, if also at their often comical expense.

Prompted by the experimental theatricality of early modern portraiture, the next two chapters take us to the playhouse. [Chapter 4](#), "Justice in the Marketplace: The Invisible Hand in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fayre*," addresses a major exemplar of English "city comedy," a genre devoted to portrayals of London daily life. As a minister of the law tasked with defending the commonwealth in the King's name, Justice Adam Overdo has discovered by long experience that his stature as a royal lieutenant induces those summoned into his presence to misrepresent the facts it is his duty to ascertain. In order to investigate



the “enormities” thus concealed from him, he enters the St Bartholomew’s Day market fair disguised as a humble citizen, only to find himself embroiled in the larcenous dealings he hoped to expose.

The play accordingly rings comic changes on the theme of the King’s Two Bodies. Like the monarch on whose authority he acts, and like the early modern diplomats whose complex doings and identities Hampton vividly evokes, Overdo is a *persona mixta*, at once a private individual and an embodiment of the state whose sovereign he personates.<sup>69</sup> Overdo himself makes the point on first arriving on stage. For in a monologue in which, explaining to the audience, “in justice’ name, and the King’s; and for the commonwealth,” who his character is and what he is doing there, he violates both the conventions of the public utterance of private speech on which soliloquy rests and the “fourth wall” that separates dramatic action from the world spectators inhabit. Even as he speaks “in character” in order to illuminate his inner motives and intent, metaleptic address to the audience induces him to denote himself in the third person, as someone whose identity in this time and place is complexly parcelled out between himself, his judicial office, and the play on whose behalf he acts as expressly as for king and commonwealth.

Two features of Jonson’s invention complicate matters still further. First, in order to represent the fair, the play stages one: the boards are crowded not only with an outsize cast of players but with everything from display booths, pig tents, and assorted wares to a pillory and a full-dress puppet show, creating a phantasmagoric whirl in which the audience loses its way as readily as the characters do. Second, following a prologue commemorating the play’s performance at court – a prologue that, by addressing not “his Majesty, the King” but rather “the King’s Majesty” itself as distinguished from the person invested with it, quibbles over just who it takes the sovereign to be – the play opens with an “induction” in which a “scrivener” or notary reads a contract between the poet and his audience. This contract underscores a circumstance already implicit in the publicity function performed by the inclusion of the prologue in the published text of 1631: Jonson’s dramatic vision of the world of the marketplace is just as much for sale as any of the dozens of articles for which money changes hands onstage. The result however is not merely the commodification of Jonson’s work as poet, its transformation into an item of monetary exchange. By stipulating that each spectator’s right to judge and interpret the play is indexed to the price of the seat he or she occupies in the playhouse, the induction formally cedes a right spectators already have. The contract thereby shows how the process of exchange reshapes social identities and relationships in ways as potentially emancipatory as they are constraining. The whole world goes to the fair, enduring mutations (but also making discoveries) whose pattern is the fate



to which the “invisible hand” of the market subjects Justice itself in the person of the interventionist Overdo.

As we will see, a key result of this reading of the work of the market in shaping the destinies and characters of the people who haunt its precincts is to challenge the fashionable critique of “the liberal subject.” In the light especially of Foucault’s analyses of “biopolitics” and human “governmentality,” the ultimate effect of the invisible hand of both modern markets and the modern bureaucratic state has come to be seen as human subjection to normative modes of thought, sensibility, and conduct dictated by the impersonal (and so depersonalizing) needs of commercial as well as political administration. In this view, the undeniable advances that industrialization, urbanization, accelerated modes of communication, and the rationalization of state operations have achieved in living conditions have been paid for by internalized enslavement to the standardized forms of private experience that both markets and governments require to function smoothly. The individual freedom early modern liberalism associated with contract law, for example, is accordingly portrayed as an illusion in that the true outcome of the personal rights that the law of contract affirms is in fact ever deeper biopolitical control over the private lives of an increasingly regimented citizenry.<sup>70</sup>

However, if the experience of Jonson’s characters teaches anything, it is how one-sided this pessimistic picture of the emergent liberal economy is. To be sure, the enhancement of personal freedom not only from material want but also from the arbitrary decrees of social superiors has been made possible in great part by an overarching legal, political, and economic machinery that constrains as well as improves our lives. Yet, as Steve Pincus’s richly revisionary history of the Glorious Revolution of 1688–9 points out, the same machinery that enabled the state of James II to inject itself into the private lives of its subjects empowered those subjects to organize themselves to overthrow it. And even if a signal outgrowth of this overthrow was the promotion of commercial, banking, and industrial interests as inherently predatory as the royal dynasts and noble favourites they replaced, the energies the Revolution unleashed were as latently democratic as they were corporatizing.<sup>71</sup> Jonson’s Justice Overdo at one stage winds up in the stocks alongside a petulant Puritan and a penurious madman; and the end of the play finds all three trooping off to dine together in the company of a cardsharp, a pickpocket, a country booby, and a puppet man. This offers a no doubt unduly cheerful image of how markets work. But it does suggest the need to strike a greater balance than our current neo-Marxist orthodoxies allow.

And yet the agency Jonson grants the invisible hand of the marketplace is a dramatic fiction: the agency the play ultimately asserts is Jonson’s own. We see

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this not only in his financial as well as cultural stake in claiming a newfound social prestige for himself as a dramatic poet but also in the finalist perspective that governs his plot. Like all of the great dramatists of the seventeenth-century golden age of European theatre, Jonson at once deploys and expounds the demiurgical power on which his poetic authority rests. And central to that power is the principle of immanence informing the dramatic representation of events in order to create the illusion of spontaneously self-generated action mandated by the era's key theoretical source-text, Aristotle's *Poetics*. Yet even as dramatists' spell-binding power to create the illusion of self-determined action grants them the new eminence of literary authorship, it undermines (and so enriches) it by drawing attention to the complex social, practical, and psychological mediations that make it possible.

Chapter 5, "Actor, Act, and Action: The Poetics of Agency in Corneille, Racine, and Molière," accordingly tackles what period playwrights discovered to be the founding paradox of dramatic art as deliberately put to work in Pierre Corneille's *La Place Royale* of 1634, the romantic comedy that precedes his transition to tragic drama with the following season's *Medea*. The instigating "invention" on which the comedy turns is that the romantic hero Alidor is tired of playing that role. When the action begins, another action has just ended, one in which Alidor wins the love of the beautiful Angélique. But that is precisely Alidor's problem: he always gets the girl because he is fated to do so as romantic lead. No sooner then has he won Angélique than he plots to free himself by inducing her to fall out of love with him again in favour of his disappointed friend and rival Cléandre, to comically self-defeating effect.

Like the eponymous tragic hero of Corneille's *Nicomède* (1651), a character whose name is an anagram of the period French term for stage actor, *comédien*, Alidor seeks to become – or at any rate to act like – a free agent. But just as, in the spirit of the string of comedies with which Corneille's career began, it was his role to play the romantic lead, it is now his part to play the strident individualist, straining to disentangle himself from the logic of dramatic plots and the broader natural and social order plots mimic. But what does this mean if not that he personifies the founding tension endemic to the art of theatre itself? On the one hand, the illusion of spontaneous action hinges on the poet's success in crafting convincing simulacra of human agents endowed with the faculty of free will. We believe in the self-generated natural logic of the play just insofar as we believe in the self-determined acts characters perform. To this extent, theatrical illusion springs from, and, in so doing, legitimizes, the principle of human autonomy Alidor champions. On the other hand, the key to successful dramatic illusion lies not only in players' skill in convincing us that they act for reasons they sincerely experience as their own. It also depends on the general

coherence and verisimilitude of the plot as a whole, a higher-order logic that dictates actions that merely appear to be the products of free will.

Theatre accordingly emerges in Corneille and (with telling differences) in his *frère ennemi*, the Jean Racine of *Andromache* (1667) or *Phaedra* (1677), as the laboratory in which poets and audiences jointly explore a far broader tension, endemic to life in the world as they experience it beyond the walls of the playhouse: what Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) calls the "wandring mazes" of "fixt Fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute."<sup>72</sup> What empowers human persons to act, granting them a core feature of personhood as such, is the set of overmastering events their apparently self-determined actions help construct. Conversely, the events by which they find themselves overtaken turn out to be the constraining sum of the acts they freely choose – as often as not at cross-purposes. The Jesuit-trained Corneille comes down on the side of free will, the Jansenist Racine on that of dark predestination. Between them, they outline a debate central to the growing early modern awareness of the specifically communal, and so historical, grounds of human agency.

Both sides however remain imprisoned by an antinomy neither can resolve, for both approach it in the perspective of the kind of heroic action associated with the noble form of tragedy. It remains then for comedy, and more specifically the comedies of Molière, to point the way beyond. And Molière's comedies do so by reminding us that the agents of tragic action are mere actors in the theatrical as well as analytical sense. As actors, that is, as people whose most earnest actions are, in the end, an "act" one of whose most interesting models lies in what players do when deploying the art of acting, Molière's *comédiens* underscore the experimental and so open-ended character of acts of every kind. For to the extent that to act is to *put on* an act, it loses the kind of ontological irrevocability Corneille embraces and Racine dreads. Human beings become humans *being*, free in a way the metaphysics of free will could never achieve.

Further, in acknowledging the experimental freedom period theatre extends to its characters we also discover how nearly its basic canons adhere to the experimental protocols of emergent natural science. Alidor, Nicomède, Phèdre, and Molière's *comédiens* represent so many experimental subjects exposed to the controlled conditions of an experiment designed to precipitate a series of closely watched events whose outcome teaches the watchers something new about the powers and limits of personal agency. And what watchers learn in this way amounts to a test of its own by putting pressure on another set of pessimistic doctrines endemic to current early modern studies: those clustered around the notion of "political theology" inherited from Carl Schmitt's analyses of sovereignty as refracted through the melancholy lens of Walter Benjamin's work on the German baroque *Trauerspiel*.<sup>73</sup> Especially when taken

in tandem with the biopolitical critique of “liberal subjectivity,” it has by now become something very like an article of faith that the central mode of early modern experience is tragedy. Ensnared in the toils of what the Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito calls the “machine of political theology,” early modern persons are perceived as having been condemned to act out the tragic fall into material history to which Max Weber gave the name of modern “disenchantment.”<sup>74</sup> The only authentic form of early modern experience is thus taken to be the melancholy of Hamlet or the dying because finally disenchanted Don Quixote. But if, as the theatrical experiments described in [chapter 5](#) indicate, comedy was not only an equally plausible outcome but in many ways the truly authentic one, humanity’s accession to early modern personhood sheds a richer and, above all, far less gloomy light.

[Chapter 6](#), “The Experiment of Beauty: *Vraisemblance Extraordinaire* in Lafayette’s *Princesse de Clèves*,” turns to what is often described as Europe’s first psychological novel. We will however approach the text from a new angle. Given that, whatever else it is, Lafayette’s tale does look like a novel, celebrated among other things for the acuteness of its insights into the psychology of love, jealousy, and human relationship, why was it chiefly famous in its own day for having provoked a heated literary controversy that called in doubt the realism on which its claims to novelhood hinge? As indicated by (among others) Roger de Rabutin, comte de Bussy, author of the *Histoire amoureuse des Gaules* (1665), a collection of racy *historiettes* satirizing the sexual misadventures of people at court, the core issue in the controversy turned on the plausibility (or *vraisemblance*) of the heroine’s confession to her husband of her adulterous (if unconsummated) passion for another man: a confession she makes to enlist her husband’s help in defending her from desires she no longer has the strength to resist on her own. Bussy’s chief argument amounts to citing the plain evidence of everyday life: such a proceeding has never been seen or heard of, especially on the part of a member of the *beau monde* like Lafayette’s princess, and is therefore inherently unconvincing, to the detriment of faith in the novel as a whole.

The key point is that Bussy, like generations of critics after him, has mistaken the nature of Lafayette’s enterprise. Bussy is right to suggest that, in focusing with such intensity on the feelings and conduct of a representative human being, the key notion at work in Lafayette’s text is that of person. This circumstance will indeed lead us to run an inventory of Lafayette’s uses of the word, documenting among other things the pre-eminently honorific status mentioned earlier. However, as the term’s honorific character implies, the ruling concept of person in the book is not based on observed (and so real) human behaviour; it is derived from the heroic tragedies of Pierre Corneille, and in particular that poet’s *Le Cid* (1637), whose heroine sacrifices her love for the

hero for the sake of what she believes she owes herself as the daughter of a noble lord, killed in a duel by the very man she loves.

In defending his play against charges of both dramatic and psychological implausibility, Corneille coins the notion of “vraisemblance extraordinaire.”<sup>75</sup> The poet’s aim is less to produce characters who conform to ordinary canons of psychological verisimilitude than to find the means to persuade audiences that the truly exceptional beings he presents could genuinely exist in a debased world like our own. Lafayette’s goal is exactly similar: to use the means at a novelist’s disposal to make a plausible case for the kind of heroic self-overcoming everyday life shows to be unlikely if not impossible. The novel thus offers a limit case designed to test the potential of human personhood at both ends of the scale: that of the anti-heroic norms of observable human conduct and that of a heroic self-transcendence that remains within the reach of human imagination even if it eludes us in real life. The outcome, in the novel’s final sentence, is one of the stranger yet most characteristic configurations in early modern literature: the novelized imitation of a woman whose virtues are, in every sense, “inimitable.”

Finally, in [chapter 7](#), “Groping in the Dark: Aesthetics and Ontology in Diderot and Kant,” we turn to the late Enlightenment and, more specifically, to the moment when, famously roused from dogmatic slumber by *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), Kant tried to digest the deep shifts in human experience and self-awareness underlying the “experimental method” whose fruits Hume advertised in that book. As the chapter’s title indicates, the key concepts are aesthetics and ontology. What Kant sought to rescue from the terminal disrepute into which Hume cast it was providence. Does human life possess an inherent pattern, purpose, and meaning, or is it merely an expression of the material contingencies on which the triumphs of natural science seemed to depend? Is the best we can hope for the adduction of the sorts of demoralized “matters of fact” on which early modern experimentalists insisted, or can we legitimately claim to discover in experience itself the moral and teleological values needed to give existence a genuinely human face? The affirmative answer Kant defended hinged not only on the “categorical imperative,” the innate human responsiveness to a supersensible call to moral conduct that showed how both morality and human freedom escape the laws of natural determinism. Above all, it turned on Kant’s interpretation of aesthetic experience. Radically “indeterminate” as human judgments of beauty and sublimity may be, they are nonetheless an irreducible fact of human life: a kind of metaphysical promise built into the very fabric of our experience of self and world alike.

Kant’s answer was anticipated by developments in the actual practice of aesthetic forms whose pre-eminent spokesman and commentator was the encyclopedist Denis Diderot: a novelist, dramatist, and journalist as well as philosopher

who arrived at the same answer from the side of the naturalist reduction Kant abhorred. Though conditions of censorship in mid-century France prevented him from saying so explicitly, the perspective Diderot brought to bear was vigorously Spinozan. Like Kant, Diderot took aesthetic experience and the artworks that both convey and promote it to express dimensions of self and world inaccessible by other means. But where Kant interpreted the experiments involved as tokens of realities that lie beyond the confines of immanent nature, Diderot saw them as expressions of the natural whole as such. This did not however lead him to deny the transcendental truths of freedom and natural purpose Kant tried to defend. On the contrary, by reversing the temporal order to which Kant adhered, he set out to show how purpose and freedom are best understood as the effects rather than the causes of the achievements they make possible.

Such is the lesson of Diderot's work as an art critic, in particular the "Vernet Promenade" in his review of the Paris Salon of 1767 in Friedrich Melchior Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire*. By presenting a series of landscapes by Claude-Joseph Vernet not as the subject of a journalistic report on the paintings themselves but rather as actual landscapes experienced at first-hand, Diderot demonstrates the creative power art shares with the natural world it appears merely to mimic. Rather than passively mirror natural experience, art engenders it, showing how all of the values that Kant identified as metaphysically prior to engagement with the world are in fact its fruits.

## 8. The Experiment of Person and the Experimental Work of Art

We will do our best throughout to be as true to all of these artefacts as we can, bringing them more fully into view than before. And yet if they are indeed, as I see them, experiments that not only represent the people, actions, and events they portray but intervene in the world in order to reveal what would otherwise escape us, the result is impossible to forejudge. For we too are participants, and experimental subjects as well, and so share in the fate that awaits them even as we determine for reasons of our own what that fate will be. The readings to follow will accordingly happen to us as well as the objects on which we visit them, changing both them and ourselves.

Which is, once again, why applying the word "experimental" to experience at large, in all its forms, proves useful. As we will see more particularly later, one of the most arresting features of Lafayette's *Princesse de Clèves* is also the most unmarked. Though the text nowhere expressly acknowledges it, the opening chapter's careful reconstruction of the historical setting in which the action unfolds places the tale on the eve of the outbreak of France's religious Civil Wars with the Amboise Conspiracy of 1560: a failed Huguenot attempt to seize

control of the French state by kidnapping the young king, François II, and the leaders of the ultra-Catholic faction at court, François, duc de Guise, and his brother Charles, duc de Chèvreuse and Cardinal of Lorraine. Most of the leading characters in the novel, including the Guise brothers themselves, would thus soon be embroiled in vicious sectarian strife; and some, including the duc de Guise and the *reine dauphine* Marie Stuart, known to the English-speaking world as Mary, Queen of Scots, would suffer violent death. A deliberate cloud accordingly hangs over the novel from the start, a sense of foreboding not unlike the entirely unintended one that, in retrospect, can be seen to hang unnoticed over Pico's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*.

Both of these texts present heroic portraits in which we admire the unique human capacity for imaginative self-determination. Exactly like Molière's Sganarelle, an ignorant man of the people, destined as such to be scorned and to obey, who nonetheless discovers that he has a mind and moral value of his own that cannot be ignored, Pico's philosopher and Lafayette's inimitable princess bear witness to a potential that exceeds given expectations all the more conclusively for doing so in the mode of plain matter of fact. And yet both also make us poignantly aware of the precariousness of that gift. Great as their virtues are, and plausible as their authors contrive to make those virtues appear, our sense of them is subtly coloured by retrospective awareness of the events that put them to the test.

But is this not what works of art are for? Martin Heidegger once remarked that, "in the artwork, the truth of what is has set itself to work. Art is truth setting itself to work."<sup>76</sup> I do not believe in truth in the way Heidegger meant it. As I have suggested throughout this introduction, if the early modern experiment teaches anything, and this against the grain of many of its participants' longings and intentions, it is that there simply is no truth, *the* truth, once and for all. There is only what turns out to be true – or not, as the case may be. But then that *is* the truth, or as much of it as we are likely to need or know.



# The Shape of Knowledge: The Culture of Experiment and the Byways of Expression

In joining early moderns in using the word person as the term of choice for what we tend today to call self, we gain a clearer grasp of the rich, multidimensional sense of human individuals they entertained even when, in Shakespearean soliloquy, Cartesian meditation, or Rembrandtesque self-portraiture, self's gaze appeared to turn most acutely inward. A consequence is to break the habit of following Immanuel Kant's lead in talking about the so-called subject: that inner conscious mirror of external reality to which we have been led in large part by awarding René Descartes's views on these matters greater historical as well as intellectual weight than they deserve.

I argue elsewhere that the specifically Cartesian contribution to the early modern experience of self has been seriously exaggerated, and to profoundly misleading effect.<sup>1</sup> For one thing, it encourages us to assume the existence of a single dominant exemplar under which all others may be subsumed as tokens of a single type. This is what Michel Foucault notably does in taking the dismissal of the possibility of madness in Descartes's first meditation to epitomize the sense of self for the entire "classical age": the decidedly odd (if canonical) term the French use to cover the whole period of their history from the end of the religious Civil Wars with the promulgation of the Edict of Nantes in 1598 to the revolutionary beheading of Louis XVI in 1793.<sup>2</sup> The problem however is not just that there were many alternatives to Descartes's picture and the authority it exerted even in France. Insofar as there was in fact any one person to whom the honour of inventing the "modern subject" could be granted, if it was not, as the English claim, the William Shakespeare of *Hamlet* (1603) or, as the Spanish allege, the Miguel de Cervantes of *Don Quixote* (1615), or again, as Italians might insist going right back to the fourteenth-century dawn of the Renaissance, the Francesco Petrarca of the *Scattered Rhymes* (1374) or the Giovanni Boccaccio of the *Decameron* (1353), it was surely Michel de Montaigne far more than



Descartes. And it was Montaigne not simply because his work reached a far wider readership across Europe than Descartes's ever did; nor just because it was he who most sharply delineated the sceptical dilemmas Descartes felt obliged to solve. It was Montaigne above all because, even before Descartes gave the notion its paradigmatic modern expression, he had abandoned belief in a single, overarching a priori idea of the sort from which, like Aristotle and the Church Fathers before him, Descartes supposed self's nature and properties could be regularly deduced. Seeking self in the crazy-quilt of the personal experiences in which we concretely meet it, Montaigne discovered the contingent multiplicity of which practical experience is as such the medium and model.<sup>3</sup>

Yet as different as the pictures Montaigne and Descartes presented of self or person were, both saw the consequences as bearing not only on persons themselves but also on knowledge. As Montaigne asserts in the opening sentence of his final essay, "Of Experience" (1588, with revisions till the final, posthumous *Essays* of 1595), "There is no desire more natural than the desire for knowledge."<sup>4</sup> To be sure, as the essay unfolds, we learn that his intent in saying so is largely ironic. At first glance, the claim seems to ratify the flattering notion, inherited from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, that what distinguishes human beings from other animals is a natural drive for knowledge that transcends other, putatively lower, and in that sense more natural desires like those for food, sleep, shelter, or sex. The larger point he aims at is quite different, however: to show that the desire for knowledge is in fact no less natural than any other since its goal is in the end to enable us to live those fully natural lives of which all human desires of whatever sort are experimental expressions.

The question now to be addressed is twofold. First, we ask what difference the broadly Montaignian picture of experimental personhood made to early modern theories of knowledge in general and the epistemic practices those theories sought to explain and justify. For if, as Montaigne suggests, knowledge is a natural function as intimately tied to our underlying animal natures as digestion, defecation, or procreation, then what is it really? This in turn yields our second concern, to which we return towards the end of this chapter. If knowledge itself is fundamentally experimental, what more does this tell us about the kind of creatures who possess it, or at any rate believe they do? As we will see, the answer to this second question will be found in Baruch Spinoza's notion that, far from simply standing radically apart from each other in the way the traditional theory of knowledge alleged, person and world are mutually expressive. The way the world appears to me as an object of knowledge is in the first instance an expression of who and what I am, and so of what it is I look for as well as find in it. To this extent, the world as I come to know it is an artefact of the particular being I am rather than a direct insight into the nature of reality itself. However,

if I am in the end as integral a part of the world as anything I learn about it, then such knowledge as I seem to possess is real in ways experience alone can teach. The form in which I see the world is the form in which the world manifests itself to me as being that part of the world that sees it in just those terms.

In any event, from the strictly epistemological standpoint whose self-betraying limits Montaigne's "Apology for Raimond Sebond" (first version 1580) energetically challenged, producing the sceptical dilemmas his seventeenth-century successor tried to solve, Descartes makes two key errors. The first and more obvious is dualism, the radical separation of mind and body he took to be a precondition of knowledge. But the second and more decisive mistake concerns the underlying notion of knowledge itself that grants dualism the surface plausibility that has made it a live philosophical issue to this day.

Dualism's plausibility emerges in the pair of thought experiments in the second of Descartes's *Meditations* (1641) that Blaise Pascal fastened on in reframing Descartes's question about the nature of self, replacing the latter's "but what then is it I am?" with the more pungent (and fully modern) "what is *le moi*?" The passage begins with the famous example of the bit of wax. How do I know that a bit of wax that melts on approaching a candle flame is in fact the same bit of wax even though all of its sensible properties change? The temptation is to say, as Robert Boyle would later, that I know it from experience, as plain "matter of fact." While I watch, what had been a hard, odourless object, grayish in colour and emitting a soft rapping noise when I tap it on my workbench, turns liquid, acquires a translucent amber hue, and gives off the scent of honey. Yet what exactly do I observe if not a series of contrasting states none of which unimpeachably announces that it belongs to the same object since each gives way to another quite unlike it?<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, as the passage continues, what is it that I see when, going to the window to watch passersby in the street, I observe what appear to be other human beings? How do I know that they are in fact human beings at all rather than diabolically clever automata dressed up to look like human beings? (2.426–8) Descartes concludes in each case that I know it not because, as ordinary language suggests, I see it for myself as the evidence of my own eyes. I know it because I correctly judge it to be the case. The judgment I form may depend on various tests and the experiences they deliver – where automata are concerned, by engaging one in conversation to see if it responds appropriately or not. Nevertheless, judgment is an act of mind, as such logically independent of experimental circumstances whose truth it alone ascertains.

To spot the mistake, it is helpful to draw a distinction that Ian Hacking borrows from Foucault. On one level we have the "surface knowledge" Foucault calls *connaissance*, formed by the specific items of knowledge involved: it is

in fact the same bit of wax; it is in fact a real little boy. But on a second, more fundamental level stands “depth knowledge,” Foucault’s *savoir*: the subtending disciplinary system that shapes what can be known by defining the shape of knowledge per se.<sup>6</sup>

Even for Descartes, as for any sentient being, the search for knowledge begins in experience – a fact the *Meditations* underscores by taking the critical demolition of the testimony of sense as its inaugural task.<sup>7</sup> In seeking knowledge, moreover, we aim not just at truth for its own sake but at reducing experience to the intelligible order we need to master and remodel it in ways conducive to our personal well-being. This is a point both Montaigne and Spinoza make in observing how all of the, in the end, purely abstract qualities human beings use to describe the world as being beautiful or ugly, good or bad, meaningful or senseless, take root in the body and in the discovery of what we believe contributes to its contentment, however misguided our judgments in these matters often turn out to be.<sup>8</sup> Knowledge then not only begins but ends in sense. For it has a purpose: that of adapting self and world as closely as possible in order to permit creatures like us to flourish. Drawing a pointedly anti-philosophical lesson from the experience of the person he calls, with deliberate irony, “that great man,” the fable-spinning slave Aesop, Montaigne puts it this way:

Let us use our time well; as it is, much of it is left idle and ill-employed. Our mind doubtless lacks hours enough to see to the tasks assigned it without dissociating itself from the body in the little space it has been granted to meet its needs. (3.327)

But where Montaigne, guilty perhaps of the moral as well as intellectual indolence Pascal accused him of,<sup>9</sup> is untroubled by the fact, Descartes wants more. His goal is not just useful or happy knowledge that, as such, may and indeed need not be knowledge at all. He seeks *true* knowledge of the sort that, on Montaigne’s view, experience shows to be an illusion even as it seems to promise something like it. For despite the revolutionary changes Descartes is repeatedly said to have introduced in his character as the purported founder of modern science and philosophy alike, granting them the intellectual autonomy the *cogito* proclaims and the professional discipline that enables them to advance without mistake, knowledge as he imagined it remained exactly what the tradition down to his day had always said it was: “science,” with the full weight of the Latin *scientia* from which the term derives. Knowledge in this sense is possession of unassailably necessary truths for whose form, authority, and reality tradition supplied two models: the demonstrative and, because demonstrative, rationally irrefutable truths of mathematics; and the mind of no less a personage than God – God the omniscient, omnipotent, and eternal, in

the unrefracted light of whose intellect all things stand revealed in the timeless present of truth itself.

To be fair, Descartes confesses that we cannot in fact know what and as God does, namely everything, and by a direct and total intuition from which nothing is concealed. The confession becomes indeed the cornerstone of his ontological proof of God's existence, when he shows that God must exist because it is impossible to imagine how imperfect creatures like us could acquire a notion of his infinite perfection if he did not (2.438–41). It is notoriously true that Descartes needed God to escape the vicious circle the Jansenist Antoine Arnauld was the first to notice in the first meditation's proof of his own existence as a thinking being. For if, as later meditations explain, God alone guarantees, in his essential goodness as well as wisdom, that correspondence between our ideas about the world and the reality of things themselves without which knowledge claims are vain, then where does the apparently self-ratifying certainty the first meditation grants the *cogito* come from?<sup>10</sup> But this logical tangle underscores a larger point. Even in Descartes's eyes, such knowledge as we possess is inevitably partial, conditional, and so subject to error, revision, and change. And what is this if not the principle of falsification at the heart of even the rationalist-deductive ideal of scientific method Descartes embraced? Wholeheartedly as he believed he had discovered the laws of nature a priori from first principles, he still needed to compare the outcome with the actual state of the world as available to direct empirical inspection.<sup>11</sup>

The fact remains that, as John Dewey observed in making his own Montaigne-like case for the primacy of experience, God's mind was and, for many, remains the paradigm to which science aspires.<sup>12</sup> This licenses among other things the association with a hubristic pact with the Devil that has dogged its steps ever since Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (staged c. 1594; published in 1604). But it also identifies it with what, in his ongoing duel with the reductionist impulse behind modern physical science especially where accounts of the rise and nature of consciousness are concerned, Thomas Nagel has called "the view from nowhere," a mode of knowing ultimately untethered to any specific standpoint in space or time.

Starting with the tension between subjective and objective notions of knowledge, Nagel argues for a "dual aspect" theory of mind whose epistemological fruit would be "the obverse of skepticism because the *given* is objective reality – or the idea of an objective reality – and what is problematic by contrast is subjective reality."<sup>13</sup> Nagel readily concedes that we may never escape our native subjective (because embodied) viewpoint. Yet just insofar as knowledge is our aim, and knowledge is comprehension of the truth, the terms of our dual embodiment as minds as well as bodies promise at least asymptotic progress

towards reality as something like a Kantian regulative Idea – a goal perhaps impossible to achieve whose emergence as a necessary good still commits us to proceed as though we could. However, just because, like Descartes, Nagel assumes that knowledge, to be knowledge, must be knowledge of *the truth*, and so of what is true always and everywhere, independent of what we may happen to believe, the contents of God's mind constitute the standard against which what we know is measured. This image contains the very form of knowledge itself as progressively revealed to us in the timeless "laws of nature": laws that as such, and like the analytic truths of mathematics and logic, hold always and everywhere, as immutable and omnipotent as the decrees of divine providence on which they are modelled.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, Montaigne's insistence on the priority of experience and, along with it, the looser, less hubristic picture of knowledge he defends retained their currency, and nowhere more manifestly than among active experimentalists. To see how, we turn to one of the more vexing byproducts of early modern experimentalism: the infamous "problem of induction."

Ever since John Locke's critique of the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), empiricists have argued that we can only claim to know those things for which we find some warrant in experience. The mind may not quite, at birth, be Locke's *tabula rasa*, the pure blank slate on which experience scrawls the sensory "impressions" that supply the raw material for the perceptions and ideas out of which knowledge is built. As was already suggested by the problem William Molyneux posed in a letter of 7 July 1688, asking Locke what a congenitally blind man would see were we to grant him sight, we must at least possess a specific and, in the case of higher animals like humans, highly intricate sensory apparatus whose organization and properties condition the form impressions take.<sup>15</sup> Still, every notion we form, however complex and metaphysically remote from daily life, can finally be traced back to its "originals" in empirical interaction with the external world. Absent experience, the mind would have no content, and thus no chance of knowledge of any sort, even of itself.

Witness, in the century following Locke's, the thought experiment Étienne Bonnot, abbé de Condillac, elaborated in his *Treatise on Sensation* (1754) to tease out the deeper epistemological implications of Lockean sensationalism. The experiment requires that we imagine a being, Condillac's "statue," initially deprived of sensations of any kind. To start with, not only would it sense nothing, it would have no determinate ideas at all. It is then only once we turn different senses on one at a time that it would begin to acquire notions both of its inhabitation of an external world and of its own existence and identity. Moreover, such ideas as it forms would be conditioned by the shape and activity

of whichever sense it currently enjoys. The world as it knows it and, correlatively, the self-awareness it would develop with reference to that world would emerge as a direct expression of sight or smell, touch, hearing, or taste.<sup>16</sup>

Condillac resisted the temptation to reduce knowledge of self and world to the pure operation of sense. He remained committed to a spiritualist interpretation of identity at least to the extent that the process by which the statue would construct a world out of whatever sensory experience it possessed implied a drive for knowledge and coherence he believed the mere activity of sense could not account for. He accordingly concluded (as Locke himself tended to) that there must be some latent inner immaterial spirit prompting a properly intellectual effort he deemed unthinkable without it.<sup>17</sup> But the statue's knowledge of self and world alike would still of necessity express the kind of experience its operative sense allowed. Nor would such knowledge be in any obvious way in error. As Locke remarks in his *Essay*, a theme Voltaire develops in several of his philosophical tales, we can imagine beings – angels, say, or Saturnian giants like the title character of Voltaire's *Micromégas* (1752) – endowed with richer, more powerful, and more numerous senses than mere earth-bound humans enjoy. Nevertheless, the world as we find it in such experience as we have remains true even if only so far as we know, licensing and indeed confirming such limited and imperfect yet still veracious inferences as the senses we possess permit. As Locke puts it in the introduction to the *Essay*,

When we know our own *Strength*, we shall the better know what to undertake with hopes of Success: And when we have well survey'd the *Powers* of our own Minds, and made some Estimate what we may expect from them, we shall not be inclined either to sit still, and not set our Thoughts on work at all, in Despair of knowing any thing; nor on the other side question every thing, and disclaim all Knowledge, because some Things are not to be understood. 'Tis of great use to the Sailor to know the length of his Line, though he cannot with it fathom all the depths of the Ocean. 'Tis well he knows, that it is long enough to reach the bottom, at such Places as are necessary to direct his Voyage, and caution him against running upon Shoals, that may ruin him. Our Business here is not to know all things, but those that concern our Conduct. If we can find out those Measures, whereby a rational Creature put in that State, which Man is in, in this World, may, and ought to govern his Opinions, and Actions depending thereon, we need not be troubled that some other things escape our Knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

The trouble is that, as David Hume eventually pointed out, becoming thereby the reputed author of the problem, when looked at closely, the basis for

knowledge provided in this way turns out to be far more slender even on its own terms than Locke, Condillac, or Voltaire were prepared to admit.

Take an example from the series of pneumatic experiments on respiration that Boyle conducted with his air-pump in the 1660s.<sup>19</sup> We observe that a bird (in the first experiment a full-grown duck) placed in a transparent glass receiver suffocates when we evacuate the air the receiver contains. We naturally infer from this a causal relation between the two events. However, as Hume stressed in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1738–40), and again later in the more approachable *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) composed to secure the popular readership the first book failed to win, though we observe a correlation between the action of the pump and the near death of the bird, correlations are not causes. The bird's brush with death certainly follows the expulsion of the air, and thus appears to be its effect. But in the absence of direct empirical evidence as to just how the effect has been produced, the potential cause of death remains unknown.<sup>20</sup>

Further, how can we tell on the basis of this one experiment, or even of an indefinitely extended series of such experiments, that the same cause will always produce the same effect? For all we know, at some point in the distant past or future, or even now on some remote planet where the laws of physics and avian biology work differently than on earth, the bird might in fact survive a permanent loss of air. The only way to know would be to conduct experiments we cannot since we are prisoners of the narrow window we occupy in space and time. And even if we were, *per impossibile*, to perform such experiments, we would still face the same core difficulty as before. Correlations are not causes. We may regularly observe a "constant conjunction" of two events – the evacuation of the air and the near death of the bird. And we may be tempted to call that conjunction causal. But the very idea of causality has been smuggled in without clear justification, as the metaphysical name we use for regularly occurring relations whose underlying natural springs stay hidden. So long then as knowledge ultimately depends on experience, and however far forward or back we push our observations and the explanations and inferences they seem to license, we will never have the irrefragable evidence we need to decide that there is in fact a cause, what its nature might be, and why it operates to the effect we observe.

Given both the perennial character of the problem of induction and the role Hume played in defining it, it is perhaps surprising to note, with the historian Peter Dear, that Hume himself did not name it and does not even seem to have seen it to be a problem.<sup>21</sup> From his standpoint, he merely drew conclusions from the facts at hand as part of the more general effort to clear up metaphysical muddles – if possible by getting rid of metaphysics altogether.



Thus he noticed that human beings regularly discern three core types of relation between objects, events, and ideas: resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect (*Treatise*, 61–3; *Enquiry*, 26–7). All three have a basis in experience, and all three contribute to the formation of our notions of other kinds of relation: identity, difference, quantity, degrees of shared qualities, or relative location in space and time. But neither of the first two speaks directly to the question of causality except insofar as the notion of a cause implies some sort of contiguous contact. That leaves only the relation of cause and effect itself, and, at bottom, this turns out to be a matter of mere temporal succession. When Hume considers how two objects supposed to stand in a relation of cause and effect are actually connected in experience, “I immediately perceive, that they are *contiguous* in space and time, and that the object we call cause *precedes* the other we call effect” (*Treatise*, 205). But, when all is said and done, what does the mere succession of two contiguous events tell us? Nothing whatever unless it happens more than once; and even then only that, in our experience, the first event is regularly followed by the second. However frequently the succession may occur, it cannot by itself explain why one event regularly follows the other, still less why one event *must* follow the other, and so cannot infallibly predict that it will do so again on some future occasion. Causality for Hume is the abstract name we more or less arbitrarily give the constant conjunction of two events, an observed regularity for which we cannot assign a clear, decisive, and, above all, necessary reason.

Hume did believe that we can, and do, calculate the likelihood that a given cause will produce a given effect (*Treatise*, 174–93; *Enquiry*, 55–7). When rain-clouds gather, it makes sense to take an umbrella since, based on past experience, the chances are it will rain. Hume also argued that the thoroughgoing scepticism his analysis of causality appeared to encourage was not only needless but impossible (*Treatise*, 311–21; *Enquiry*, 41–7). Like Montaigne before him, he held that, while experience provides no certain guide in science or morals, its guidance remains serviceable, especially when treated with that carefully dosed degree of scepticism its inherent uncertainty calls for. What is more, the emergencies of practical life often compel us to act as if we know what the outcome will be even when we are aware that we do not. Still, these concessions to the facts of everyday life in no way prove that we know, or ever could know, with the certainty the more punctilious among us would like to claim. But that is just the point. To see the “problem of induction” as a problem rather than as a simple matter of fact, you have to believe that knowledge could, and should, amount to more than it does: the best because most reasonable guess that past experience and present circumstance permit.



Yet the problem persists, becoming *the* problem that, awakened from his “dogmatic slumber” by Hume’s *Enquiry*, Immanuel Kant felt philosophy had to solve in order to justify faith in science.<sup>22</sup> This persuaded him to define epistemology as the most critical task philosophy faced, a status that discipline retains to this day, often at the expense of morals or the traditional pursuit of wisdom.<sup>23</sup> And, in Kant’s defence, people had good as well as defensive reasons for thinking this way. Kant came to agree that whatever knowledge empirical disciplines like natural science, history, or medicine supply must be rooted in experience. And he also agreed that, as Hume showed, experience as such presents nothing more than bare empirical “phenomena,” experimental “appearances” incapable of yielding direct insight into the underlying nature of what the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781; 2nd edition 1787) calls “things in themselves” (*die Dinge an sich*), independent of our incorrigibly narrow and self-referential traffic with them.<sup>24</sup> But he went on to argue that the idea of causality is no mere arbitrary imposition on our part. It is an a priori principle embedded in the faculty of reason itself as an indispensable condition of reason and experience alike. For without it we would be unable to make sense either of experience or of the world experience makes known to us (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 218–27).

So while the notion of causality may well be a metaphysical postulate in that it has no basis *in* experience, it remains a logical condition of possibility of experience: an organizing principle without which we would have no experience at all, let alone the disciplined kind to which we owe natural science. And once that is acknowledged, the merest glance at everything natural science in particular has accomplished since Galileo, Boyle, and Isaac Newton suffices to show just how deep and coherent our growing picture of reality has become, dispelling the threat of Humean scepticism.<sup>25</sup> True, in a famous footnote to the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Kant cites with approval the inscription carved above the door of the Temple of Isis (Mother Nature) in ancient Egypt: “I am all that is, that was, and that will be, and no mortal has lifted my veil.”<sup>26</sup> Still, the fact that Kant’s ventriloquized Nature proclaims her invincible transcendence, setting an inviolable boundary to what human beings can learn, in no way diminishes the reality of the progress science has already made and can be expected to make in future. For the same rational faculty that teaches limits transcends those limits, if only in the form of the transcendental Idea by whose light reason orients its efforts and achievements.

The early modern era thus produced two competing general theories of knowledge. Both adhered to the centrality of experience and, in both cases, experience was understood in fundamentally naturalistic terms. In explaining why the modern theory of probability emerged just when it did, namely around

1660 largely through the efforts of Christiaan Huygens, Paul de Fermat, and Pascal, Hacking writes that two fundamental concepts had to change for it to happen: the concept of evidence and the concept of signs. And the key to making this change lay in a new sense of the importance of mere things.<sup>27</sup>

In the Middle Ages and deep into the Renaissance, what we would now call evidence had chiefly taken the form of oral or written testimony whose persuasive value or “probability” in the sense of likely veracity depended on the social or intellectual standing of the witness who delivered it.<sup>28</sup> The evidence adduced in any given case accordingly consisted of words, and was weighed against the acknowledged authority of the person who uttered them. However, thanks in part to changes in legal definitions of evidence, seconded by a growing absorption of the epistemic as well as practical lessons to be drawn from the empirical work performed by artisans, engineers, and alchemical or medical “empirics” unhappy with Aristotelian, Galenic, and (increasingly) church dogma, the emphasis began to shift to the testimony of physical objects and the manipulations to which they could be exposed.<sup>29</sup>

Attention was thus brought to bear on documents and how they could be authenticated and interpreted, on the physical traces of an act or event rather than on verbal reports of what had transpired, and on the way substances of various sorts changed as a result of chemical or mechanical operations conducted on them. The objects so observed in turn became signs, but without changing their ontological status as things. Where then, in the past, controversial matters had been decided by weighing the seeming authority of the witnesses who spoke on one side or the other, focus increasingly fell on the physical tokens involved – and the more emphatically in that the growing depreciation of formerly authoritative speech encouraged scepticism regarding the value of oral testimony as such. Under what circumstances could a given witness be trusted either to know or tell the truth in view of the fact that, unlike physical objects which simply are what they are, people have motives, biases, histories, and private allegiances that are always liable to colour what they say, perceive, and believe?<sup>30</sup>

Both early modern theories of knowledge thus shared a common touchstone in nature – but nature defined as real because immanent existence, as the sum of things accessible to direct experience to the exclusion of emanations from that “other” world Kant called “the supersensible.” What made the difference between the two rival schools of thought was then less how each saw nature *qua* nature, and so what counted as evidence, than how each pictured knowledge itself. Hume and his followers were content to take knowledge in the forms in which active engagement in the world of experience made it available to them, whatever its inherent limits and however dubious or ambiguous the results. By contrast, their opponents held fast to the conviction that, if we are in fact to

claim to know anything rather than merely make our best guess at it, we must in some sense know absolutely, or at any rate as nearly so as we can.

Still, though the issue was thoroughly (if inconclusively) debated throughout the period, as in fact it continues to be today, the scales were decisively weighted on the experimental side from the first by the very nature of everything Hume's critics had to concede in order to join in debate at all.<sup>31</sup>

As we have seen, the problem of induction is only a problem for those who, unlike Montaigne, Hume, or indeed anyone actively engaged in the world of ordinary practical affairs, measure knowledge against some unobtainably absolute standard. Early modernity produced many absolutists of this sort even among the most innovative natural philosophers. Francis Bacon was one, and so was Newton; and so too were the great Continentals, Descartes, Spinoza, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, not to mention Kant himself. This explains how the relaxed, eminently pragmatic mode of scepticism Montaigne and Hume championed, presenting doubt less as a painful philosophical difficulty than as a handy tool useful in testing our ideas against the data of everyday life, remained the deep metaphysical dilemma someone like Descartes insisted it was. But however large it continued to loom in theory, the problem of induction was in practice treated as being essentially unreal. As early moderns discovered *de facto* if not *de jure*, the issues with which they grappled were ultimately decided by events, and by the experience of events, whatever form the raw falling out of things might take.

Consider a point Barbara Shapiro documents, extending Hacking's argument about the emergence of probability theory across the full spectrum of forms of knowledge in the seventeenth century to include the disciplines of law, theology, history, and letters as well as natural philosophy. The experimental model Boyle and his associates worked out abandoned the kind of certainty Descartes aimed for, replacing it with the standard of probability and the degrees of certainty probability affords.<sup>32</sup> In the best of cases, when our reasoning is at its sharpest and our experiments are conducted with utmost rigour, we may achieve "moral" certainty of the truths or, more carefully put, of the facts that experiment, and so experience, adduce. In the language of English common law, we may be certain "beyond a reasonable doubt" in that we can discover no legitimate reasons for doubt without resorting to the sort of hyperbolic exertions exemplified by the evil genius Descartes felt compelled to invent.<sup>33</sup> But this in turn acknowledges that probability is the only available measure.

The lesson was implicit in the shape of things themselves. As experience teaches, knowledge is inescapably (and properly) experimental in the broad, early modern sense of the term discussed in the introduction. As we saw, early modern usage did not confine the words experiment and experimental to the

kinds of activities pursued in modern science. They applied them to experiences of every sort, from Boyle's work with his air-pump to thought experiments like those Descartes and Condillac performed, and from believers' faithful watches in the night to Hume's reports of how the porter's arrival with the afternoon post confirmed because it everywhere presupposed underlying certainty of the world's ongoing reality (*Treatise*, 246–7). In using the terms this way, moreover, they did not make the usually implicit distinction we tend to between the "objective" modes of experience cultivated in natural or social science and the "subjective" forms variously associated with German *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, the spontaneously lived experience of sensation, emotion, and association or the anecdotal wisdom of memory, community, and tradition. Early moderns understood as clearly as we that experience frames and colours the things it presents. For all the apparent immediacy and self-evidence with which people, places, and objects surround us, they do so – and can only do so – in the forms prepared for them by everything from our basic sensory apparatus to our most idiosyncratic habits, convictions, mental associations, and desires. And yet this does not by itself vitiate the genuine epistemic interest and value of even our most arbitrary, distorted, or prejudicial perceptions.

In anticipation of the role that, in our next chapter, visual art will be seen to have played in these matters, let us take the example of our responses to a portrait painting. The face I see in Hans Holbein the Younger's portrait of Desiderius Erasmus (1523) will inevitably show differently depending on factors that have as much to do with me as with its own properties as a face (Figure 1). Do I, for instance, recognize it as belonging to – as indeed being – some particular person? And if I do, is it with pleasure or disdain, admiration or antipathy, love or indifference? What, further, do I make of faces in general? What do I look for in determining not only who but what kind of person this is, marked by what character or social condition, and to what effect? And how, more generally, does the fact that the portrait presents not just a person but, precisely, a portrait affect how I look at and so see who and what it is? For example, as we will discuss in more detail in chapter 3, what is the difference between the kind of thing we encounter in Holbein's portrait of Erasmus and what we meet in a *tronie* or character study like Frans Hals's *Gypsy Girl* (1628; Figure 2), and how does this difference condition the way we look at them? All of these things inform the face as it appears before my eyes, ensuring that what I see in it will diverge from what someone else sees, as from what I myself will see on some other occasion, in a different mood, and on the basis of different assumptions, questions, and experience.

Putting the matter another way, we do not simply and passively *see* the things we see; we make them out. An element of construction is thus inherent to the



Figure 1. Hans Holbein the Younger, *Portrait of Desiderius Erasmus* (1523). Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York. Image source: Art Resource, NY.





Figure 2. Frans Hals, *Gypsy Girl* (1628). Louvre, Paris. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

process of perception as such. In the case of a portrait, whatever I happen to make of it, there would be no face at all without this act of construal. And yet the face is no less just what it is for looking as I chance to see it. How else could you and I be sure we were in fact looking at the same face, and then describe and, further, go on to re-describe it to each other in such a way as to change what each of us perceives in turn and what both of us discern in concert?<sup>34</sup> In this light, the most cursory glance supplies the basis for an experiment even in the narrow, modern sense of the term. To look at anything – a face, a bowl of fruit, a landscape, the starry heavens – is to change as well as apprehend it if only because looking takes knowledge, skill, and above all the time in which to discover something more than first appeared.

But then, going the other way, looking, tasting, touching, listening, smelling are not simply acts I perform upon the world; they enable the world to manifest itself to me. The acts of perception by which I represent the world to myself are also interventions in Hacking's sense: exploratory soundings that at once reveal and modify not simply how the world appears but what it is found to be.<sup>35</sup>

Such is moreover the evidence of early modern experimentalism narrowly so-called. When a bit of wax was brought into proximity with a candle flame, when the air was pumped out of a hermetically sealed glass receiver containing a bird, or, to take an example celebrated in 1771 by the painter Joseph Wright of Derby (Figure 3), when an alchemist created white phosphorus out of urine by letting the liquid sit for a week before stirring in cinnamon powder and charcoal dust, the act that prompted discovery produced the event in which the discovery was made. Rather than simply observe the ordinary works of nature, experimentalists intervened in such a way as to change and indeed subvert its "natural," unmolested course. This in turn lent substance to the charge adversaries of the new science frequently levelled at virtuosi: that what they did was not in fact philosophy at all but something more like quackery. Such was one of the claims Thomas Hobbes made in the *Dialogus physicus* of 1661, on the nature of air, opening his debate with Boyle over the value of Boyle's work with air-pumps. The physical happenings induced in the laboratory were singular and, what is more, entirely artificial events that, as such, begged the question of natural causes they needed to answer in order to count as true philosophy – the proof being Boyle's reluctance to draw causal inferences at all, confining himself to accurate description of experimental matters of fact and the techniques employed to produce them.<sup>36</sup>

But, as we have just seen, even the most tactful acts of vision leave their mark. This underscores two deep insights informing Hacking's analysis of the historical origins of the calculus of probability, both keyed to mutations in notions of



Figure 3. Joseph Wright of Derby, *The Alchemist, searching for the Stone of Wisdom, discovers phosphorus and prays for the success of his experiment, as was the custom among ancient chemist-astrologers* (1771). Photo: Bridgeman-Giraudon/Art Resource, NY.

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probability traditionally grounded in the rhetorical persuasiveness associated with the evidentiary authority of different types of witnesses.

Hacking's first point is that the new, modern concept of probability that emerged around 1660 involved a shift in the way early moderns weighed the value of what philosophical tradition deprecated as mere "opinion."<sup>37</sup> From at least Plato on, opinion was conceived as a form of ignorance, representing as it did what people believe in the absence of sure knowledge. To take an example from Plato's *Republic*, to believe, with Socrates' adversary Thrasymachus, that justice is the free exercise of force in pursuit of self-interest is to be confused about what justice really is. For one thing, it conflates justice with having the authority to decree what justice is, thereby opening the way for the kind of partisan violence Thrasymachus' picture transparently licenses in that virtue's name.<sup>38</sup> But the conflation is only possible because Thrasymachus lacks a proper definition of the formative idea of justice as such, a true grasp of which would have directly revealed the fallacy even in his own mind.

Further, the idea of justice, as an idea, cannot be reduced to what even a better person than Thrasymachus thinks. What we happen to believe in the beleaguered here and now of the world of restlessly changing material appearances merely reflects our spontaneous and so unexamined feelings, assumptions, and biases, exposing our beliefs as being creatures of the moment. By contrast, the truth of a given matter is, like all truths, inherently changeless and eternal – just what the Platonic copula, the atemporal *is* of dialectical definition, proclaims it to be. Opinion of the sort Thrasymachus voices is then a product of the mental enslavement Socrates later describes in the *Republic's* myth of the cave: a belief in shadows only possible because believers lack knowledge of their true nature and condition. And how else, from Plato's point of view, could we explain not only how readily the Athenians persuaded themselves to put Socrates to death but the rising fortunes of the Sophists who made it a principle of the rhetorical art they taught to exploit popular opinion even at the expense of what they themselves knew to be true?<sup>39</sup>

Down to the early modern era then opinion was categorically opposed to "science" as the shadowy nothing to which people cling in the absence of true knowledge. Nevertheless, as experience taught, people not only continued to hold opinions but felt compelled to act on them, as often as not with good reason given the pressure of events. And once it was further understood that the kind of certainty *scientia* sought was chimerical, opinion ceased to be the opposite of knowledge. It was instead increasingly seen to occupy a place on a continuum of which both terms were members. The difference between opinion and knowledge became a matter of relative justification or degree: the greater the body of evidence one could muster in support of a given belief, the greater

the likelihood that it was true. Whence the concomitant shift in how early moderns spoke of probability in general, describing it less as an index of rhetorical plausibility than as a measure of a belief's relative proximity to a truth that could never be determined with absolute certainty.

But whence too the corollary: that knowledge, like opinion, is a feature of human existence in the restless world of material appearances from which Plato believed it had to be rescued. This brings us to Hacking's second point. The modern concept of probability enfolds a dual insight that looks in two directions at once. On the one hand, it is an "objective" measure of the likelihood that an event will occur in conformity with whichever natural law we argue governs it – in the classic example, the chances that a coin toss will come up heads. But, on the other hand, it is a "subjective" measure of the confidence that characterizes our belief.<sup>40</sup> The two dimensions condition each other. The fact that mathematics indicates that the chances the coin will come up heads are roughly fifty-fifty encourages us to believe that it will do so with that degree of certainty. Yet the fact that the sense of probability presents two faces underscores its experimental character. There is no "objective" measure of the chances involved without the "subjective" belief that gives it both meaning and utility, putting us to the trouble of calculating it for reasons of our own.

The Epicurean Pierre Gassendi urged the same lesson in his contribution to the collected objections and responses that accompanied the original text of Descartes's *Meditations*. He objected, for instance, that the only thing the certainty Descartes claims for the *cogito* tells us is that we are certain: it does not by itself suffice either to establish the grounds for that certainty or to prove that we are right. The world as it appears to us in philosophical inquiry every bit as much as in daily life is just and only that: the world as it appears to us, without remainder. It is after all "you yourself who sees colours, hears sounds, etc. [...] It is in fact you who sees, who hears, and who feels all things." For, "if truth be told," the eye you see by "cannot see without you," and thus without everything you bring to the business (2.721–6). Knowledge does not exist in the state of metaphysical abstraction Descartes's absolutist commitments persuaded him it had to in order to count as knowledge at all. It only exists for concretely embodied persons as an expression of the interests, purposes, and passions that engender the pursuit of truth in the first place.

As our earlier example of looking at portraits already suggests, the visual art of the period vividly confirms the phenomenon. The single greatest achievement of late medieval and early modern painting was what the art historian Ernst Gombrich whiggishly if unanswerably called the "conquest of reality."<sup>41</sup> As the painter Nicolas Poussin put it in a letter dated 1 March 1665 to his friend and patron Roland Fréart de Chambray, painting is "an Imitation made

with lines and colours on some flat surface of everything that can be seen under the Sun.”<sup>42</sup>

Like Descartes’s account in the *Discourse on the Method* (1637) of the range of matters over which geometric reasoning grants philosophical mastery, Poussin’s definition hedges a bit. For all Descartes’s boastfulness in claiming that, so long as the method he proposed was properly applied, there can be “nothing so remote that we cannot reach it nor so deeply hidden that we cannot find it out,” he carefully stipulated that he spoke only of such things as “fall under human cognizance” (1.577). He thereby disclaimed insight into mysteries known only to God and his authorized churchly interpreters. Similarly, Poussin confines the scope of painting’s achievements to such things as can be seen with the human eye. Painting does demand a work of divination on the beholder’s part in that what we see in a given picture must be related not only to that portion of the visible world it portrays but also to the ruling idea with which the painter set about portraying it. For instance, in order fully to appreciate Poussin’s *Hebrews Gathering Manna in the Desert* (1639; Figure 4), we need to relate the details of the painting’s composition, colour scheme, and management of human bodies, gestures, and expressions to the presiding typological thesis according to which the Mosaic story prefigures the later Christian Eucharist.<sup>43</sup> The fact remains that the means at painting’s disposal are by definition exclusively visual.

The hubris that motivates Poussin’s mitigating disclaimers is nonetheless just as palpable as Descartes’s. In saying that painting turns mere line and colour into images of “everything that can be seen under the Sun,” Poussin asserts its power as well as limits. When he says everything, he means everything; and insofar as reality is just the visible world, nothing escapes painting’s imperious eye. Yet as a painter rather than a philosopher devoted, like Descartes, to the pursuit of absolute truth, Poussin does not (and cannot) identify with the Cartesian “view from nowhere” that Nagel identifies as the ideal to which knowledge aspires.

In a letter to Sublet de Noyers written some time around 1649, Poussin discusses two ways of looking at painting.<sup>44</sup> In the first, bearing on the “aspect” a picture presents, we look at what it expressly portrays for us: the scenes, persons, and actions it depicts viewed on their own terms as the picture’s content. In the second, by contrast, we turn from the picture’s aspectual content to the underlying “prospect” that structures our view. If the work of imitation Poussin highlights in the letter to Chambray succeeds, the prospect initially disappears in the dramatic spectacle it serves to create. We see what the painting represents, not how: the “illusion” it engenders conceals the means employed to do so. It is then only when we step back from engagement with the picture’s subject that we begin to work out how the trick was turned, and in the first instance



Figure 4. Nicolas Poussin, *Hebrews Gathering Manna in the Wilderness* (1639). Louvre, Paris.  
Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

how far the illusion depends on the occupation of a specific, embodied view-point. Successful imitation, a convincing sense of immediate visual presence, is grounded in the realistic representation of a three-dimensional world whose model is found in natural visual experience. But, as experience teaches, the world we meet in natural acts of vision is inherently perspectival in that we always see it from a particular standpoint, the somewhere that marks our own location in space and time. And it is, finally, only once we grasp that fact that we abandon the passive posture of mere aspectual gawking in order to explore the picture in the active, prospective way required to penetrate its secrets.

The outcome, however, is just as two-faced as the calculus of probability. As Svetlana Alpers has memorably shown, the power to convey a convincing image of the natural world that enabled painters to produce not only complex history paintings like Poussin's *Manna* but faithful portraits like Holbein's also enabled them to undertake the detailed, quasi-Baconian description of visible reality pursued in seventeenth-century Dutch landscapes, street scenes, architectural paintings, and genre vignettes.<sup>45</sup> Alpers even suggests at one stage that many Dutch painters pursued an ideal of pure mechanical reproduction approaching in accuracy and precision the kind of photographic "objectivity" whose signal contribution to nineteenth-century physical science Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison document.<sup>46</sup>

As Alpers compellingly argues, the English naturalist Robert Hooke provided a powerful model for the descriptive art of the Dutch Golden Age in his account of the epistemic as well as aesthetic principle guiding his *Micrographia* of 1665, a sumptuous folio presenting a collection of engraved images recording the marvels seen through a microscope (Figure 5). To be sure, the technology of the day obviously prevented the kind of direct photographic record Hooke seems to have had in mind and that is so commonplace today. Indeed, as Matthew Hunter has shown in a wonderful recent analysis, though Hooke strenuously asserts that the images in his book are exact representations of the things his microscope revealed, he himself explains that they do not portray what he actually saw. They constitute instead a synthesis of what he learned that he saw at the end of a whole series of observations taken at different times, from different angles, and under different light conditions over a long period of time.<sup>47</sup> The picture of a grey drone's head reproduced in Figure 5 was thus built up from a succession of separate, often starkly contrasting microscopic views taken in order to teach Hooke what he was looking at by correcting for and then eliminating the deformations incident to any one of them. Hooke emphasizes the point by setting alongside the complete drone head a detailed picture of a section of one eye-cluster in which he includes the distorted reflections of the windows in the room where he worked (Figure 6).



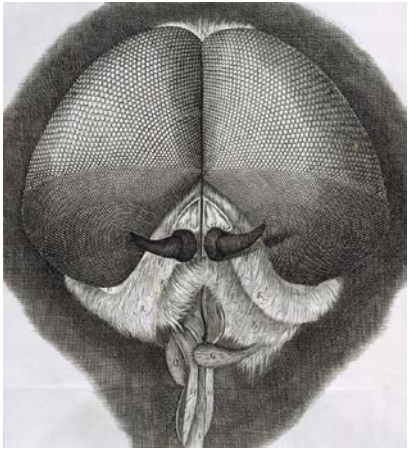


Figure 5. Engraved head of a grey drone, from Robert Hooke, *Micrographia* (1665).  
Photo: HIP/Art Resource, NY.

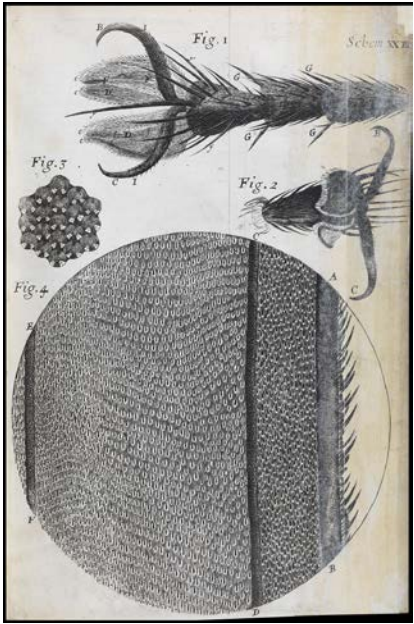


Figure 6. Microscopic views of a drone's head, from Robert Hooke, *Micrographia* (1665). Scheme XXII. © The Royal Society.

The idea was nonetheless that the “sincere hand” of art could draw exact replicas of what the “faithful eye” of science could see, especially when the two worked in concert to correct as well as fuel each other’s operations.<sup>48</sup> And the evidence of the role this notion played in Dutch art is the frequency with which Dutch painters resorted to perspective grids, magnifying glasses, dioptric and catoptric lenses, mirrors, and above all *camerae obscurae* as instrumental supports for their artistic endeavours. Though the technology needed to realize it would not be available until the nineteenth century, a governing ambition was already that of the modern camera.

And yet as close as Dutch art may have come to achieving the kind of erasure of the human element the age of mechanical reproduction is often misleadingly said to have made possible, Hooke’s hand and eye remained unmistakably human organs, driven by human interests, habits, and needs. For one thing, painters only painted what they chose to, or at any rate what those willing to commission their work indicated they were willing to pay for.<sup>49</sup> Painters also conformed like everyone else to the symbolic as well as technical conventions of the culture in which they lived. As photographically precise as Dutch genre vignettes may be, they teem with emblematic accessories (oyster shells, broken pipe stems, yapping dogs, luxuriating cats, heavy trousseaus of keys dangling from the locks of open doors) that point to some sort of usually sexual moral.<sup>50</sup> But even when, as in landscapes, architectural paintings, or depictions of anonymous Dutch citizens going about the ordinary chores and pleasures of everyday life, there was no obvious moral end in view, the mere fact of visualization stamped the form of private visual experience on painting and beholding alike.

There is then no view from nowhere, and so no “object” that is not at once the thing it is and an index of the person for whom it exists. This explains the peculiar urgency of the question of the human relation to truth Pascal asks in the *Pensées* (first, highly imperfect edition in 1670):

Thus pictures seen from too far or too near. And there is only one indivisible point that is the true place. The others are too near, too far, too high, or too low. Perspective assigns it in the art of painting. But in truth and in morality, who will assign it? (Sellier 55)

As a confirmed rationalist as well as Christian apologist, Pascal was in no doubt that the perspective we look for, the one point in space and time from which truth may truly be seen, lies in God. Yet the burden of the analogy reminds us that we are not God, and so are condemned to know truth in exactly the way we do the natural world explored for us in painting. From whatever point in space and time, and so in experience, an inscrutable providence has assigned us a providence whose dispensations, seen from our perspective,

appear so random as to be the effects of chance<sup>51</sup> – the knowledge available to us is inherently perspectival, and so experimental: an expression of experience in its most basic creaturely form.

The literature of the period proves equally unequivocal on this score, and it does so precisely in that it was committed both to depicting and to precipitating live experiences like those that art lovers enjoyed: the actions, insights, and sufferings literature portrayed were triggers for those it stimulated in the readers and theatre-goers who consumed it.<sup>52</sup> The problem of scepticism in *Hamlet*, for example, is no mere intellectual puzzle. It is a matter of life and death fraught with deeply felt moral, cosmological, and political consequence for all concerned, including the icily pragmatic Fortinbras who ascends the throne once the members of the Danish royal family have killed each other off. In a more satirical vein, Marlowe takes pains to set Faustus's measureless hunger for knowledge and the power it brings beside the conspicuously tawdry uses he puts them to in having sex with the spectre of Helen of Troy or in playing schoolboy pranks on monks in the Vatican. And the genre in which some of the most daring speculations about the nature of reality were undertaken turns out to have been the love lyric of the English Metaphysicals. John Donne's "Elegie: Going to Bed" (first published in the *Poems* of 1633, but widely circulated in manuscript long before) is typical in this regard. The act of seduction the poem performs on readers as much as on the poet's fictional mistress is energized and ennobled by analogy with contemporary voyages of discovery:

Licence my roaving hands, and let them go,  
Behind, before, above, between, below.  
O my America! my new-found-land,  
My kingdome, safeliest when with one man mand,  
My Myne of precious stones: My Emperie,  
How blest am I in this discovering thee!<sup>53</sup>

Yet the ennobling metaphor is playfully tainted by the erotic context. The resulting image-train captures the tumescent excitement with which the lover explores the beloved's naked body; and in recalling the carnal end pursued, it lays bare the comparably fleshly motives driving Spanish conquistadores or English merchant adventurers.<sup>54</sup>

It is important to note, however, that the change in question here was no mere "subjective" imposition, leaving early moderns prisoners of thought-worlds of their own making. And deeply rooted though it was in social, cultural, and economic conditions specific to the age, it was not simply the historically local phenomenon it is often taken to be. As noted in the introduction, one of my aims



here is to extend and refine the successes achieved in particular by the history of early modern science. Yet the history of science's successes have also generated confusion by creating the impression that period culture cut its inhabitants off from the bedrock realities that early modern poets, painters, and virtuosi imagined they had uncovered.

It is telling that early moderns themselves entertained doubts of this kind. It is by now a truism, for instance, that one result of the new physical science stimulated by Nicolaus Copernicus's *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres* of 1543 was to dramatize the deepening gap between the form natural phenomena like the motion of the sun or the dropping of a stone take in "common" experience and what is really happening. Though it looks as if the sun orbits the earth, the reverse is in fact the case; and a stone falls not because, as Aristotle taught and everyday observation seemed to confirm, it is compelled to do so by its own inner nature as an inherently heavy object but because the invisible yet irresistible force of universal "magnetism" or gravitation operates on it to that effect.

The same idea was at once generalized and regularized in Bacon's analysis of the "idols of the mind" in *The New Organon* of 1620 and the use his followers in the Royal Society put it to.<sup>55</sup> Though natural philosophers may have got there first, it quickly became a commonplace of ordinary conversation and moral as well as intellectual debate that the way we experience the world is shaped by an interlocking complex of factors of which we may at any given moment be wholly unaware. Bacon's "idols of the tribe," or the customs and prejudices of the community in which we have grown up, lead us to resist change, defending the status quo in the teeth of the available evidence. The "idols of the cave," byproducts of temperament, the health (or ill-health) of our bodily organs, or the private interests that persuade us to see things one way rather than another, make us as vulnerable to mistake as the shadow-gazers in the Platonic myth Bacon borrowed his term from. The "idols of the marketplace," engendered by our inveterate misuse of language, and especially the habit of turning words from their common senses to make our ideas seem more novel and attractive than they really are, not only cause us to talk at cross-purposes but, in fomenting terminological imprecision, generate ersatz realities whose sole warrant is the fact that we have names for them. Meanwhile, the "idols of the theatre" breed both the perils of philosophical "systems," in which self-ratifying consistency takes precedence over responsibility to truth, and the vainglorious prepossession we risk feeling for our own opinions just because they are ours – a vice further encouraged by thrusting intellectual ambition and the sharp elbows of public polemic. All of these sources of blindness, error, and partisan conflict were clearly perceived by everyone as a matter of plain experience even if it was notoriously far easier to see the mote in another's eye than the beam in one's own.

We find the same concern in the anxieties briefly discussed in the introduction about the danger of solipsistic alienation expressed in the widespread fascination with the phenomena of madness and the “green-eyed monster” of sexual jealousy: states of mind in which the world turns inside out to become a pure paranoid projection of the delusional obsessions that threaten to overtake us at any moment. Alienation of this sort was moreover a latent potential of early modern theories of perception itself even in its most rudimentary operations. For if it is the case, as Descartes taught in advancing his version of the thesis of the contrast between primary and secondary qualities, that there is no necessary “resemblance” between how things appear to us and what they really are, then perception may in fact be a pure brain event deprived of any correspondence with the external world.<sup>56</sup> In this view, and for the “veil of ideas” scepticism it promoted,<sup>57</sup> the human skull becomes a virtual-reality helmet in which the world that seems to present itself with raw immediacy is composed of nothing but phantom images projected on the inner walls of the “sensorium” lodged in our heads. This picture generated further reasons for hyperbolic doubt not only in the hypothesis of the evil genius but in the question of how we know that passersby in the street are real people rather than clever automata. Eventualities like these would have made no sense before someone like Descartes hit on them even if, in Hilary Putnam’s “brain in a vat” thought experiment or the conventions of science fiction films like *Bladerunner*, *Matrix*, or *Source Code*, we descendants of early modern philosophy still have trouble shaking the nightmare off.<sup>58</sup>

Still, such delusions remained firmly anchored in the surrounding social and material environment of shared as well as personal experience that enabled early moderns to diagnose the conditions and at least try to trace them to empirical sources. The fruit of Bacon’s investigation of the idols was at once whole-some scepticism about one’s own habits of mind and the effort to control for the refractions and distortions to which perception, thought, and belief are naturally susceptible. Such was indeed the basic goal of the procedures that virtuosi devised in putting experience to a test under the eyes of reliable witnesses, as of the attendant shift from the standard of absolute certainty Descartes espoused to that of the more humble moral certainty the theory of probability mandated. Meanwhile, even in Descartes, madness seemed less a metaphysical quandary than a product of the “occluding vapours of black bile” (2.406), thoroughly explicable in terms of the still prevailing humoral theory of the body and its relation to the mind.<sup>59</sup> And if it is true that we sometimes experience difficulty in making the transition between dream and waking states, the reason was seen to lie at least as much in shared source material as in the mind’s momentary inability to control its own activities. The engine of the entire development of

the problem of doubt in the first meditation, finally driving Descartes to the extremity of the evil genius, is in fact how hard it turns out to be to break with the data of ordinary experience. Even in the case of dream, for example,

it must at any rate be acknowledged that the things that are portrayed to us in sleep are like tableaux and paintings, which can only be formed on the basis of resemblance to something real and veracious, and thus that at least such general items as eyes, a head, hands, and all the rest of the body are not imaginary but are rather true and existent. For in truth, even when they labour with all the artifice at their command to use bizarre and extraordinary forms to portray sirens and satyrs, painters nonetheless cannot give them forms and natures that are entirely new but can only make a certain mixture and composition of the members of diverse animals; or if their imaginations are extravagant enough to invent something so new that we have never seen anything like it, with the result that their work portrays to us something purely feigned and absolutely false, yet at the very least the colours they use to compose it must be veracious. (2.407)

No matter how convincing as well as outlandish dream apparitions may be, the moment we wake we discover that their contents can always be traced to everyday archetypes.

The bilateral tenor of the experiences in which early moderns plunged was thus a complex compound in which inner and outer, “subject” and “object,” mind and matter collaborated, prodding each other to make, and change, the world. An especially revealing example of how this process worked is the pervasive, and growing, early modern focus on facts: the kind of self-correcting activity already met with in Boyle’s efforts to adduce matters of fact in the carefully contrived spaces of empirical experiment.

As Shapiro argues again slightly later, the literary historian Mary Poovey rightly urges that the very concept of fact, of discrete findings or items of information whose establishment is felt to compel assent, is a datable occurrence. True, Poovey distinguishes between “modern” facts and the kind of “ancient” or “Aristotelian” facts she believes had circulated since antiquity. What chiefly makes the difference in her eyes is the role numbers characteristically play in the modern version – to the point where, in statistics notably, numerical data are often regarded as containing the very form of fact as such. By contrast, Shapiro not only takes a broader view of what counts as fact, avoiding Poovey’s narrow stress on the numerical variety; she also argues that facts did not properly exist before early modern times any more than the modern, post-rhetorical theory of probability did.<sup>60</sup> What Poovey regards as ancient or medieval facts Shapiro more justly describes as examples, illustrations, or instances whose truth-value

is strictly subordinate to the only truths that truly mattered: the universal, a priori truths of which they were, precisely, examples, illustrations, or instances.

To the extent then that “facts” of some sort were available down to the early modern era, they differed from those early moderns deployed in three key respects. First, they were not found to be true independent of the higher-order teachings of rational nature or divine revelation. As we noted in the introduction, the ignominious death of Alcibiades or St Peter’s denial of Christ instanced truths already known on higher authority, and were communicated in the same body of writings as the truths they instanced. Second, even if derived from contemplation of the order of nature, such “facts” as ancients or medievals collected were not natural in the specifically naturalistic sense of being features of immanent experience explicable without resort to the a priori causes and reasons of Aristotelian science or Christian faith. Above all, they were not evidence of the sort Descartes contrasts with the “evidences” of “common” experience that constrained ancestral thought and perception alike.<sup>61</sup> Nor, consequently, could they exercise the kind of epistemic authority they came to once early moderns set themselves the task of ascertaining them.<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, the larger point Shapiro and Poovey share, one with which I entirely agree, is that what we now think of as fact has a history, and that history begins in Western Europe sometime around the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. But does this mean, as Poovey is tempted to conclude, that early moderns simply invented facts out of whole cloth and that they are therefore mere artefacts of historically local interests and practices rather than the inescapable truths they are purported to be? Are we then compelled to think of facts and the bodies of knowledge they help build up as pure social or cultural constructions whose writ extends no further than the historically contingent settings in which we pursue and use them?

Poovey is far from alone in talking about facts, and about knowledge in general, in this way. Facts, knowledge, truth itself, even when this last term designates not an impalpable metaphysical quantity (*the truth*) but simply the accuracy (or sincerity) of a particular description, statement, or piece of evidence,<sup>63</sup> are thus regularly (and blithely) said to have been “produced,” “constructed,” or “invented” rather than discovered, worked out, or proved. There is an obvious sense in which usage of this kind works against the grain of grammar. While facts, say, may at a stretch be “true” or “false,” they cannot be “constructed” and remain candidates for either truth or falsehood. Similarly, insofar as knowledge is in fact knowledge rather than error, prejudice, fantasy, or fiction, we cannot properly “produce” it in the way we can the many kinds of artefacts (encyclopedias, textbooks, scientific papers, journal articles, monographs) we use to communicate it. It occurs to me indeed that confusion on this latter

point contributes to the facility with which we twist grammar in the way we do. We conflate the knowledge conveyed or expressed in material objects with those objects themselves.<sup>64</sup>

More fundamentally though, in speaking of facts, truth, or knowledge as products or constructions, we implicitly endorse the absolutist epistemologies whose blind spots and excesses construction-talk is in large part meant to finger and correct. For construction-talk implicitly supposes that these things either are what we credit them for being or do not exist as such at all. But facts, knowledge, truth do exist even if they can only do so relative to those who take them to be facts, knowledge, or truth.<sup>65</sup>

There is no doubt – I myself have been arguing the case – that what counts as fact, knowledge, or truth changes not only from person to person but both over time and across cultures: a fact all the more obvious where concepts of “fact” itself are concerned since, as Poovey and Shapiro demonstrate, the very notion of fact is a datably historical phenomenon. But this fact – if, as I take it, it really is one – explains not only why such matters are mutable; it further explains why they are corrigible, and so how it comes about that we not only differ in what we believe, and debate about who is right and who is wrong, but also, barring delusions or acts of intellectual dishonesty whose reality is itself plain matter of fact, refute and sometimes even persuade each other to therapeutic effect. In his *Maxims* (1678), the French moralist Jean de La Rochefoucauld observes that “hypocrisy is a homage vice pays to virtue.” Adapting this maxim for epistemological purposes, Bernard Williams writes: “Self-deception [...] is a homage fantasy pays to the sense of reality.”<sup>66</sup> Neither of these thoughts would be possible, or intelligible, if there were no outside to how we act, how we conceive ourselves, or what we perceive and believe.

To return to the case of the early modern “invention” of matters of fact, it is certainly the case that facts are facts, and matter as facts, only for those who set out to establish them, as Poovey and Shapiro do in arguing for their historical nature and limits. It is also the case that facts are not independent of the purposes, theories, values, rules, and procedures we bring to bear when we undertake to find, test, verify, and interpret them. It could not, after all, be known as a fact that moons orbit the planet Jupiter until Galileo spotted them through his telescope and compared their positions on a number of different sightings to show that they circled that distant body. Nor would Galileo have had occasion to establish this fact had he not had ulterior motives for doing so: to promote, say, the new system of physics he had devised, written in the all-important “language of mathematics” and guided by the theories of relative and inertial motion that enabled him to make directly physical sense of astronomical phenomena such as the retrograde motion of planets; or again,

more crudely, to publicize the virtues of the improved telescope that earned him the patronage and protection of the Republic of Venice. Yet the decisive if curious fact about facts is that, once established, and however discouragingly contingent and ambiguous they may be, we are stuck with them. For they offer evidence of real things whose presence (or absence) makes a real difference both to how we perceive the world and conduct our affairs in it and to the fate our notions and actions endure at the hands of ensuing events.

The Church could then deny the reality of the moons seen through Galileo's telescope, and do so on what passed at the time as impeccable scriptural and scientific grounds.<sup>67</sup> The moons were not there because they could not be since neither scripture nor the laws of astronomy as Aristotle taught them allowed for them. Nor was it immediately obvious that what one saw through a telescope was something real rather than an artefact of the refracting lenses that alone made them visible. And yet of course they were there just the same, and are there still; and once consensus formed around that fact, they delivered unmistakable evidence that what did not really exist was the world according to Aristotle and scripture. Which is just why, from the Church's point of view, their reality had to be denied. For once Jupiter's moons were acknowledged to be a fact, everything changed, including the perception of the Church's place in the world the telescope made.

The same lesson emerges from Poovey's historical examples, and for a start the invention of double-entry bookkeeping in fifteenth-century Italy.<sup>68</sup> I agree with her that, even if neither its Italian inventors nor their imitators elsewhere in Europe spoke the language of facts, the new method of accounting relied on them and demonstrated their uses. For the professed aim of double-entry bookkeeping was to enable merchants and moneylenders to determine the real as opposed to apparent financial health of their enterprises. By compiling a complete and accurate account of both debits and credits, of the sums of money coming in and going out together with the value of all "unrealized" holdings in the form of real estate, furniture, unsold goods, equipment, livestock, and items of moveable property like clothes, jewels, pictures, and books, proprietors could learn their true net worth and, when necessary, communicate it to others in the form of the balance between the sets of figures detailing what they owned and what they owed.<sup>69</sup>

It is already important, though Poovey does not comment on it, that the process began with drawing up an exact inventory of one's possessions, together with estimates of the cash value of all non-liquid assets – the value, say, of a painting being identified not only with the sentimental meaning attached to it or the aesthetic pleasure it imparted but with the price it could fetch at auction or on the market. The role played by inventories as laying down the foundation

for accounting underscores just how hard-nosed the business was. In keeping with the term's origins in the Latin *inventio*, meaning to find or discover rather than "invent" in our modern sense of creating or making up, compiling an inventory as a means of acquiring an accurate notion of one's worth meant cataloguing everything one possessed, and then monetizing it all – whence precisely the numbers by which Poovey is so impressed.

As a literary historian for whom the crucial test of the value of her evidence takes the form of close reading, and perhaps too as a humanist smarting (as I do) under the lash of the claims to practical superiority voiced by contemporary mathematical science, Poovey is naturally inclined to emphasize book-keeping's rhetorical aspect.<sup>70</sup> She proposes this view, moreover, as a means of challenging the credit our society often blindly places in facts and numbers alike as being not only non-rhetorical but free of the potentially distorting (if also empowering) influences of the theories, values, and interpretations humanists typically traffic in.

She is surely right to stress that the new system of accounting was meant for public rather than strictly private use, and that an important aim was to assure potential partners and creditors of one's financial well-being. She is also right to note the dubious social status of merchants and moneylenders in early modern Europe owing to the morally suspect character of their trades. Clean and accurate books could thus argue for merchants' probity or virtue as well as wealth, dispelling the odium surrounding their activities. Poovey is accordingly justified in insisting that numbers of the sort one of her chief sources, the trader John Mallis, author of the *Briefe Instruction* of 1588, taught his colleagues to pull together could and did have a persuasive function even if that function's specifically moral implications were increasingly downplayed over time. As we saw in the introduction, when the title character of Molière's *Don Juan* (1665) counters his servant Sganarelle's humble faith in God by professing his own belief in the iron laws of arithmetic, the injunction to do the math often compels assent, however wrong as well as unpalatable the facts established by such means may be. For numbers as numbers, that is, viewed independently of the interests they help advance or the ends to which they are put, do in fact resist the theories, values, and interpretations we invoke to make sense of them. And it is in this that they frequently prove convincing in ways other means of persuasion fail to.

But the fact that numbers can exert a powerful rhetorical impact in no way diminishes the properly epistemic virtues they possess. To be sure, the moment we have books we can cook them. But there would be no point in doing so if they were not supposed to provide and, what is more, were not capable of providing an accurate picture of the facts they represent. Nor would it make



any sense to cook the books if we had not first employed them to determine the truth we intend to conceal. We see this in the practice of keeping two sets of books: one for public consumption, used to deceive lenders, partners, or tax collectors; the other so that we ourselves retain the true record without which our larcenous proceedings would be pointless. Poovey mistakes the uses to which numbers can be put for those to which they were categorically designed to be put: she takes overdetermining motives for determining ones.

It is hard to imagine any human act that is not overdetermined. In morals, for example, we may do the right thing for all sorts of reasons: because it inspires a warm private feeling of self-approval, earns the respect of people we admire, or injures people we hate while bringing succor to those we like. It is moreover often impossible to disentangle these things. But insofar as we sincerely believe that what we do is right, it is right, and we are right to do it. Early modern merchants and moneylenders surely did have ulterior motives for trying (or pretending) to keep clean books, just as the most successful of them had ulterior motives for donating altarpieces to local churches, complete with donor portraits so that parishioners would pray for the souls of those who paid for them. The constitutive goal was nonetheless to keep them accurately informed of their worth, even if not especially when the resulting balance had to be hidden from others.

Whatever uses facts may serve, however they may be valued, theorized, or interpreted, Shapiro is thus right in arguing, *contra* Poovey, that they mattered to early moderns as facts rather than as rhetorical devices. As she says, early modern Europe was increasingly a “culture of fact,” of experience, measurement, and experiment, where, from accounting and the emergent science of wealth to law, history, theology, art, and letters as well as natural philosophy, the standard of proof was shaped by what was found to be the case, regardless of what we might wish or choose to believe. The point may be reinforced in the case of England, but with clear parallels in the rest of Europe, from another direction. As Christopher Hill has shown, the period in which the culture of fact took decisive root – the seventeenth century of the Stuart succession, the Civil War, the Restoration Settlement, and the Glorious Revolution – was characterized by the devastating experience of defeat visited upon all of the parties to the disputes of the age, cavaliers and puritans, wits and divines, moneymen and Levellers alike.<sup>71</sup> Facts are never more unanswerably what they are than when they turn against us. Facts were then not only useful measures or fictions but expressions of what Gaston Bachelard calls the coefficient of adversity that forms the ultimate proof of the world’s recalcitrantly independent reality.<sup>72</sup>

And nowhere was this more crucially or poignantly at work than in the early modern experience of that creature found to be at once “subject” and “object,”

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instrument and agent, the register, inmate, and creature of experience itself: the human person. It is already telling in this context that, as Descartes himself tells the story in his symptomatically autobiographical *Discourse*, his immediate reaction to the sceptical dismantling of the corpus of humanist, scientific, and theological learning he had acquired in school was not the methodical return to first principles reenacted in the *Meditations*. It was instead the decision to go abroad in search of direct “encounters” designed to teach him not only about the world in all its ethical and empirical diversity but also, and concomitantly, to teach him about himself by putting that self to the test (1.576–7). But to the test of what if not experience conceived as something that, beyond being had, inescapably happens to us, as unprogrammed and unmethodized as it is incontrovertible?

A wide range of ambient conditions and events contributed to the process envisaged here. The humanist invention of history played a role, as did the breakdown of religious authority in the Reformation. The advance of disenchanted materialism had a hand in the change, echoing the stark political realism associated with the advent of the Renaissance prince and the rise of a centralized state. The emancipatory as well as disruptive powers of an emergent market economy not only generated riches far beyond the reach of the agrarian past but turned mere manual labourers into modern contractual agents increasingly able to sell their skills to the highest bidder. And the assertion of freedom of thought and conscience hastened the transfer of notions of political sovereignty from the monarch to his increasingly self-determining (and so sovereign) political subjects. The result was that personhood turned out to be what everyone, women, artisans, and peasants as well as poets, philosophers, courtiers, and clerics, discovered they were as a matter of social and theological as well as private, political, and ethical fact. What is more, the selves so discovered were not static properties or essences, however proprietarily they were delivered to them in everyday experience. They were also experimental in the sense of being subject to test or trial and, as such, were discovered to be as mutable, contingent, and withal empirically mysterious as any other forms of matter or substance that the direct, intra-worldly experience of things put at people's fingertips.

Facts matter. It is telling that, according to Shapiro, the very notion of a matter of fact originally reached conceptual clarity in courts of law, where determinations of truth and falsehood had pronounced material consequences; and however vulnerable to fantasy or manipulation they may have been, the balances Poovey's merchants learned to draw up told the difference between riches and ruin. Galileo's moons moved the heavens just as Newton's gravitational equations later would. The English beheaded their king, and syphilis became epidemic. Casuists laboured to reconcile the rigour of the moral law

with the complex practical emergencies in which people were compelled to make pressing moral choices. As early as around 1439, the humanist Lorenzo Valla deployed the exacting philological techniques of word history, the analysis of prose style, and the use of parallel texts to prove that the Donation of Constantine granting the pope temporal as well as spiritual dominion over the Roman Empire was a fraud. Above all, perhaps, as the political theorist Ludovico Zuccolo observed with horror and disgust in his treatise on the subject in 1621, even the lowliest persons, barbers, craftsmen, fishwives, and the like, had taken to discoursing freely on what they called “reason of state,” presuming thereby to judge matters their rulers preferred to think of as “state mysteries.”<sup>73</sup> But to whom do facts present themselves if not to those to whom they happen – who witness, suffer, seek, and put them to practical use?

In *The Bondage of the Will* (1525), Martin Luther responds to Erasmus’s contention that, absent free will, no one may justly be condemned for sin since everything we do would have been predetermined by the God who condemns us. Luther defends his notion that acts necessitated by divine predestination remain perfectly spontaneous from a fallen human standpoint, leaving us entirely responsible for deeds that could not have been avoided:

I said “of necessity,” I did not say “of compulsion.” I meant by a necessity, not of *compulsion*, but of what they call *immutability*. That is to say: a man without the Spirit of God does not do evil against his will, under coercion, as though he were taken by the scruff of the neck and dragged into it, like a thief or footpad being dragged off to punishment, but he does it spontaneously and voluntarily. And this willingness or volition is something that he cannot in his own strength eliminate, restrain, or alter. He goes on willing and desiring to do evil, and if external coercion forces him to act otherwise, nevertheless his will remains averse to doing so and chafes under constraint and opposition.<sup>74</sup>

The evidentiary procedure implicitly invoked here is autopsy in the word’s strict etymological sense. In drawing Erasmus’s attention to a strikingly stark observation from everyday life, that of witnessing a criminal being dragged off to the gallows, he enjoins his adversary to look for himself. But, in the process, he also invites him to look candidly into the workings of his own heart. For if Erasmus readily understands the prisoner’s fear of death, it is not only because he shares his mortality; it is also because he is exposed to just those evil desires that have brought the wretch to the punishment he deserves.

Luther’s strategy in urging Erasmus to look for himself informs Pascal’s decision to cast the projected apology for his own version of Christian religion in the form of an exchange of letters between a Jansenist sage and an anxious

friend who wishes to believe but cannot find the evidence for faith he needs. As Hall Bjørnstad compellingly argues, Pascal defends faith by presenting a systematically naturalistic ethnographical dissection of the “creature without a creator.”<sup>75</sup> It is not just that, comfortably ensconced in the knowledge of God’s existence and benign intent, the apologist lays out the sorry alternative to belief. Through the entire first part of the argument, he proceeds as if there were no God at all – and indeed one of the proofs he planned to offer of God’s existence later in the apology was to have taken the form of adducing the Creator’s absence as evidence of his having hidden himself to compel us to seek him (Sellier 275). He thereby mobilizes the portrait of human wretchedness bereft of God in such a way as to produce not just a demoralizing picture of fallen natural experience but the second-order experience of living in the world as pictured in that way. The interlocutor was to be converted less by rational argument than by direct inspection turned on self and world alike. It suffices to look for oneself with the relentless candour that Pascal’s satirical ethnography models to know what life without faith is like, and to know it not as an item of disinterested knowledge to which reason assents but as a direct sensation whose organ is the heart: “It is the heart that knows God, and not reason: this is what faith is. God as sensible to the heart, not reason” (Sellier 680).

Autopsy also informs Thomas Hobbes’s rationalistic attack on Boyle’s work with his air-pump. As Steven Shapin and Simon Shaffer chronicle in *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life*, Hobbes’s first objection to Boyle’s matters of fact was made on a priori grounds.<sup>76</sup> Not only were Boyle’s findings confined to effects for which he adduced no underlying causes; he could not have created the void he claimed by evacuating air from his apparatus because examination of first principles shows the world to be a material plenum in which no vacuum can occur. But the reasons he went on to cite with a view to delivering the knockout blow were far from metaphysical. He noted, for example, that Boyle’s air-pump leaked, making it impossible to conclude that all of the air had been expelled from the experimental receiver. He also noted that, though much was made of the public character of the eyewitness testimony Boyle included in his experimental design, the observers involved had been recruited exclusively from the Royal Society, to which Hobbes himself was never admitted as a member. Boyle’s witnesses therefore formed a self-appointed coterie whose independence was open to serious doubt.

Above all Hobbes pointed to what he took to be the inevitable political consequences of Boyle’s matters of fact. The authority the Royal Society derived from empirical experiment challenged the security of the Restoration Settlement. Hobbes’s first reason for saying so was that the vacuum Boyle claimed to have produced made room in the material world for spirit beings that would

encourage religious zealots to claim a divine sovereignty rivalling that of the lawful temporal sovereign. But his deeper political objection was that, in making experimental virtuosi sole judges of matters of fact, Boyle's truth claims granted them an authority that a unitary state could not tolerate and survive.<sup>77</sup>

Yet what had Hobbes done here if not undermine the efficacy of his a priori arguments? For the key objections he raised, the ones he expected would provoke royal intervention, were all empirical questions to be decided not by the sovereign fiat Hobbes demanded (*auctoritas non veritas legem facit*) but by the practical event – the event Hobbes himself tried to force by intervening in public debate to what he hoped would be decisive political as well as intellectual effect. And who was finally to be the judge if not those private persons who, in putting matters to the test of events, put themselves to that test as a reflex of their moral, practical, and social investment in the outcome? In finding themselves driven sooner or later to seek conclusive evidence for their views in the, in every sense, experimental facts of the human condition, Luther, Pascal, and Hobbes not only confirm what each, in his own particular way, desired to deny: that the ungovernably factitious nature of things decides what we are compelled to take for true; they revealed the equally contingent character of their own insights, instincts, and beliefs, and so their deep personal as well as social and historical embeddedness in the world of time and change.

For person itself is experiment: we are what we learn, and then become, as an expression of our interventions in the empirical order of things. But the reverse is also true. As we noted earlier, the point to retain is the bilateral thrust of the experiences in which early modern persons met the world, and in which the world in turn responded. The notorious “split” between “subject” and “object,” self and world, is an artefact of the terms we have used since Kant to interpret a relation in which no such thing is possible.

This is the deep lesson of Spinoza's monism and of the concept he chose to describe its ramifications: the concept of expression I myself have consistently, if, till now, silently, invoked in his example. As Gilles Deleuze was the first to notice, though Spinoza nowhere defines or justifies it, the concept does all of the real ontological as well as epistemic heavy lifting in the *Ethics* (1677).<sup>78</sup> What expression pinpoints is the bilateral expressiveness by which, in early modern experience, person and world were made known to each other as complementary attributes of a single fact: reality itself, Spinoza's “God or Nature,” conceived not only as the totality of what exists but as growing awareness of its own existence. And it achieves this awareness in the only way it can: as an expression of that being that is itself reality's key expression – the complex social body-mind we call person.

It is then to the problem of expression that we turn in the next chapter.

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## Chapter Two

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# The Art of the Inside Out: Vision and Expression in Hoogstraten's *Peepshow*

### 1. Chiasmus and the Dynamics of Perspective

I open this chapter with a paradox from the hand of the great seventeenth-century Dutch Jewish philosopher, Baruch Spinoza. In the posthumous *Ethics* of 1677, Spinoza produces a startling inversion of the system of values on which common-sense morality rests. He does so by invoking the underlying motives for human conduct. It is usual – indeed, in Spinoza's view, natural and inevitable – that human beings should explain their choices, likings, and actions by saying that what they choose, prefer, or do is good. Spinoza challenges this pious self-evidence by arguing that, despite appearances, what people value as good takes its moral colour from what in fact motivates all of their perceptions and activities: the *conatus* or inborn drive to protect, enlarge, and enhance the singular essence with which each of us has been invested in becoming the creatures we are.<sup>1</sup> Like all denizens of the natural world, even the seemingly mindless and inanimate, human beings are fundamentally in the business of preserving and, where possible, extending their own existence and the field of action it commands. Whatever appears conducive to that end we call good, and whatever impedes it we call evil. The good then is, at bottom, what we take to be good for us, however noble or narrow, heroic or venal, perspicacious or misguided this assessment turns out to be. Whence Spinoza's paradox, and the unexpected light it sheds: "[W]e do not endeavor, will, seek after or desire a thing because we judge it to be good. On the contrary, we judge a thing to be good because we endeavor, will, seek after or desire it" (3p9s; 284; translation slightly altered).

The paradox serves as a model in two ways. It does so first in terms of content. By grounding value in the material conditions of human existence, it advances the task shared with period experimentalists generally: that of excavating the concrete springs of the abstract moral concepts by which we regulate our lives.

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Like Michel de Montaigne before and David Hume after him, Spinoza strikes a rigorously naturalistic posture not only on the question of the good and its role in sponsoring human happiness but on the nature of reality itself. Where the good had always seemed a changeless essence whose transcendental origin in the realm of Platonic Ideas or divine revelation shields it from contamination by the muddled contingencies of sublunary life, early moderns increasingly saw it as an artefact of merely human purpose and desire. By reversing the terms in which we normally state our relationship to the good, giving primacy to the creaturely appetites it is supposed to orient and discipline, Spinoza firmly plants himself on the side of monistic realism. The world has no metaphysical outside, making everything we know or experience an immanent expression of the one true reality, namely, nature conceived as the totality of what is.

But the paradox is also exemplary on rhetorical grounds. Spinoza's thought takes the form of a chiasmus, a crisscross figure of inverted equivalence in which apparent opposites change places to reveal a secret identity that eludes us at first sight. Chiastic reversals of this sort crop up everywhere in the period, constituting a characteristic thought-form of early modern literary, philosophical, and artistic expression. Blaise Pascal was an addict of the trope. We meet it, for instance, in the fragment devoted to the persuasive strategy Pascal aimed to adopt in the projected *Apology for Christian Religion* to convert his sceptical interlocutor to a true picture of his sorry spiritual plight:

If he vaunts himself, I abase him  
 If he abases himself, I vaunt him  
 And contradict him at every turn  
 Until he understands  
 That he is an incomprehensible monster.<sup>2</sup>

We also meet the figure in densely abbreviated form in Thomas Hobbes's notorious claim, in his 1668 Latin translation of *Leviathan* (1651), that *authoritas non veritas legem facit*: it is authority, not truth, that makes law.<sup>3</sup> The maxim's chiastic structure is packed into the disjunctive phrase *non veritas*, whose placement in the sentence telescopes the complete form of Hobbes's thought. While authority and truth are presented as rival subjects of the verb, they are also the implicit objects of the process of making Hobbes traces. For what grants authority the right to make law is the core truth Hobbes teaches: that there is in fact no law absent the sovereign authority to promulgate it. And yet, in the agonistic setting in which Hobbes argues that law first appears, truth is settled less on its own merits than as a dictate of true law – law that, in being

endowed with the authority required to compel assent to its mandates, grants the sovereign right to decree what we are obliged to accept as true. Hobbes's maxim thus states in compact form the idea Pascal unpacks at greater length in the chiasmic paradox he devotes to the relation between might and right (in French, *force* and *justice*) in the series of fragments on "the reason of effects":

*Right might*

It is right that what is right be obeyed. It is necessary that what has the most might be obeyed.

Right without might is impotent. Might without right is tyrannical.

Right without might is challenged because there are always evildoers. Might without right is denounced. We must then put right and might together, and for that make it so that what is right has might and what has might is right.

Right is subject to dispute. Might is readily recognizable and beyond dispute. So we have been unable to lend right might because might has challenged right, and has said that it was not right, and has said that it was itself right.

And thus, being unable to make it so that what is right has might, we have made it so that what has might is right. (Sellier 135)

Whatever we like to think about the relation between might and right (or force and justice) in the world we inhabit, the weight of reason always falls on the first side. Absent the might required to impose it on predatory animals like us, there is no right at all. We must then take what we can get even if lawless tyranny results.

The hinge on which chiasmoi like these turn is perspective: the trope works by turning spontaneous appearances inside out. It is closely related to the figure of irony – and Spinoza, Pascal, and Hobbes were nothing if not accomplished ironists. Still, as the communication of a meaning different from the one that appears at first glance, irony supposes a partnership between speaker and interlocutor at the expense of some third party who fails to perceive it. While it potentially triggers the crisscross dance chiasmus enacts, it does not need to since it is normally enough for the two partners to the exchange to recognize that they share the irony in view. By contrast, chiasmus is programmatically transformative. It pursues a goal that is at once persuasive and therapeutic. A form of paradox as well as irony, it aims both to model and precipitate a change of vision on the interlocutor's part. The mental transformation involved is crucial. For we see the same things as before, but from a strikingly new angle in whose light they cease to be the same. And what makes the difference is the impression of seeing them not only with fresh eyes but truly.



## 2. Chiasmus and the Art of Painting

My goal in this chapter is to explore how chiasmus functions in early modern visual art, especially in the Netherlandish north. This may strike readers as counterintuitive since, like all figures of speech or thought, chiasmus is a temporal form. It is, further, a performative. For in taking the time needed to state something, it does something – namely, provoke the kind of change in perspective I have just described.

Chiasmus resembles in this respect a performative that was hotly contested throughout the period: the words of consecration in the Catholic Mass. As Louis Marin classically remarks, a theory of performative utterances forms the cornerstone of the rigorously rational defence of the Roman interpretation of the rite of communion mounted by Pascal's fellow Jansenists, Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole. In the fifth and final edition of the *Logic or the Art of Thinking* (1683),<sup>4</sup> Arnauld and Nicole argue that, in pronouncing the words of consecration, *hoc est corpus meum* ("this is my body"), the officiant brings about the transubstantiation the words report. What is mere bread when the priest begins to speak becomes the Saviour's body in the time it takes for him to get from one end of the sentence to the other. Thus, invoking the example of a church that has burnt down and been rebuilt, the logicians claim that no one is confused when we say that the former building and the one now rebuilt are just this church. For we do not confuse the church as now present with the same church in its former state. What is true of the church of their example is equally true of the Eucharistic bread:

[O]ne could not reasonably say that there is any difficulty in understanding this proposition: *this, which is bread at this moment, is my body at this other one*. It is true that it is not the same *this* at each of these moments, just as the burnt church and the rebuilt one are not really the same church. But the mind, conceiving both the bread and the body of Jesus Christ under the common idea of a present object, which it expresses by the word *this*, judges this object, which is in reality double and only appears to be one owing to a confused semblance of unity [*d'une unité de confusion*], to be bread at one moment and the body of Jesus Christ at another.<sup>5</sup>

The "correct" Roman interpretation of the rite accordingly turns on the temporality of speech and the interval this temporality introduces into the static natural order of things. The unfolding act of pronouncing the words of consecration opens a gate through which the miracle of grace enters the world, and saves it.



A painting by contrast is by definition spatial rather than temporal. I am presented with an action – in this case a notably gruesome one, Caravaggio's portrayal of Judith beheading Holofernes (1598–9; [Figure 7](#)). The picture is powerfully dramatic. The grim determination with which the Biblical heroine yanks the tyrant's head back with one hand while drawing her sword through his exposed throat with the other, leaning slightly away to avoid the blood that bursts from the open wound; the expression of shock and pain as Holofernes awakens from his drunken post-coital stupor; bleary eyes widening in terrified incomprehension as his gaping mouth struggles for air; the vengeful set of the mouth of Judith's aged companion as she watches, twisting the cloth in her hands as though throttling the enemy in a gesture of enraged vicarious collaboration; the medley of clenched fists distributed across the scene, uniting killer, accomplice, and victim in a shared instant of convulsive violence – everything imparts a hideous immediacy to the scene. The immediacy is moreover amplified by the elimination of distance between action and beholder, by the remorseless focus of light on Judith's murderous deed, and by the explosion of blood doubled by the weird contortions of the blood-red bed-hanging that cuts off our field of vision, compelling us to face the horror Caravaggio stages.

And yet, for all its dramatic impact, the picture actually tells us very little. Assuming we do not simply recoil in fright or disgust, we do compulsively dwell on its swarming details, with a creeping prurient fascination and ambivalence as potentially dark as the scene itself. But though the painting vividly expresses, it does not, and cannot, explain what happens here. For that we need knowledge supplied by other sources, and for a start the title that points to the deuterocanonical tale. We are then trapped in a moment of undigested butchery the keys to whose intelligence lie elsewhere, in the open space-time of explanatory narrative the scene's hermetic inwardness pointedly excludes.

Caravaggio's *Judith* is exceptional, and not least in so visibly insisting on its confinement to a single visual instant. It is in fact an especially powerful exemplar of what Michael Fried calls “the moment of Caravaggio”: the way in which, by imprisoning the act of beholding in a single, indelibly violent moment in time, he forced upon contemporaries a radically new vision of painting's power to fascinate and appal that launched an irreversibly new episode in the history of art.<sup>6</sup> By that very insistence, however, *Judith* underscores the formal dilemma visual artists confront when the medium in which they set out to work is time. And time is indeed the medium of the chiasmic compositions of interest in this chapter: time, and the pictorial exploration of the patterns of bilateral expressiveness met in the preceding chapter.

The reader will recall that a major feature of the shape that knowledge acquired in the early modern era was the two-faced character of the “experiments”



Figure 7. Caravaggio, *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1598–9). Palazzo Barberini, Rome.  
Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

in which knowledge increasingly came to lodge. On one side were the matters of fact adduced by direct exposure to and intervention in the world as delivered in experience. Robert Boyle could argue that, despite Thomas Hobbes's *a priori* doubts on this score, the void really does exist in nature because he showed it to do so in his experiments with his air-pump. And Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola's grandiloquent portrayal of human excellence came crashing to the ground once Nicolaus Copernicus published his heliocentric hypothesis, Columbus discovered America, the unity of the Church fell apart in the Reformation, and the French invaded Italy, bringing in their wake an epidemic of syphilis that became a metaphor for the widespread political corruption that made invasion possible.

Yet none of these things came unmediated. "Experiment," however construed, whether in the narrow sense in which we use the term today or in the more capacious acceptance early moderns favoured, is just experience; and experience is had by those capable of having it. As Pierre Gassendi objected to René Descartes's dualist picture of mind, we only know things insofar as they appear to us: "it is you yourself who sees colours, hears sounds, etc. [...] It is in fact you who sees, who hears, and who feels all things."<sup>7</sup> Among many other changes, this insight promoted the progressive abandonment of the ideal of knowledge as *scientia*, the absolute possession of unanswerably necessary truths, in favour of the more humble (and realistic) "moral certainty" enshrined in the common-law doctrine of "true beyond a reasonable doubt" and the modern, post-rhetorical calculus of probability. And the latter in particular acknowledges the bidirectional character of empirical belief. Such certainty as we achieve has two faces: the "objective" one that calculates the chances that an event will occur in accordance with whichever mathematical law we apply to it and the "subjective" one that measures our confidence in the result. Insofar as human beings can ever claim to grasp it, truth is inherently perspectival, a function of those who perceive it as well as its own intrinsic content.

The question early moderns accordingly faced was how to draw the line between the appearances that define the limits of what we can know and the realities for which the only evidence we have are such facts as we are able to assemble, weigh, and test by experimental means. How should we calibrate and interpret the evidence of our homegrown notions and senses, and of the inferences that evidence seems to license, when such evidence is all we have to go on? The simple answer, the one David Hume eventually formulated in the mid-eighteenth century in both discovering the so-called problem of induction and in failing to see it as being a problem at all, is that practical events will decide. If it rains, and I forget to take my umbrella, I will get wet; and if I

doubt that the porter bringing the afternoon post makes his way to my study through a world whose continuing existence independent of my perceptions is affirmed by immediate awareness of how he got there, you will quite naturally, and rightly, think me mad. But this simple answer, redolent of the bluff common sense for which Hume is often taken to be the pre-eminent philosophical spokesman, does not by itself take us very far. In particular, it gives no clue as to how we might and, as a matter of fact, regularly do harness the kind of admittedly only moral certainty we enjoy in such a way as to expand, defend, and enhance the knowledge that, as another matter of fact, we need in order to live successful lives.

I submit that at least the basis for an answer to this question was quite literally there before early modern eyes. More specifically, I plan to show how painters, and especially those of the seventeenth-century Dutch Golden Age, bore witness to the path the search for an answer might take in a family of paintings devoted to exploring the nature, powers, and limits of the faculty of sight. And at the heart of the answer they gave in the form of the images they made was their grasp of the logic of bilateral expression with which the preceding chapter closed.

### 3. The Evidence of Expression in Spinoza's *Ethics*

Watchful readers will have noticed that I have freely used the term “expression” and its cognates throughout the book so far. I borrow it from Spinoza. As Gilles Deleuze seems to have been the first to notice, expression is the key concept in the system of nature elaborated in Spinoza's *Ethics*. It is in particular by its means that, as Deleuze suggests, Spinoza articulates the relationship between three crucial elements of his system: substance, attributes, and essences.<sup>8</sup>

Substance is that one, all-encompassing entity Spinoza calls *Deus sive Natura*, “God or Nature.” It contains, and indeed is, everything that exists and the complete set of natural laws that determine the forms existence takes. But substance presents itself indirectly, under a variety of “aspects” or attributes: as God and Nature, for instance; as extension and thought; or as *natura naturans*, the living process by which nature engenders all natural forms and the “modes” and “affections” they exhibit, and as *natura naturata*, the concrete shapes the process of naturing yields. Essences, finally, define each particular item of which nature is composed: the material properties things possess; the bodies they form; the modes of activity bodies engage in; and the ways they affect and modify all of those other bodies by which they are modified and affected in turn. The question is, how do these several dimensions of the one reality determine each other without violating the self-engendering unity that binds them all together?

For as Spinoza memorably insists, God, that is, Nature, as conceived under the aspect of the rational intelligibility that entitles Spinoza to speak of reality not simply as what is but also as mind, the sum of those conceptions or ideas by which it is made known to us, “is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things” (1p18; 229).<sup>9</sup> God is not something (still less someone) that stands apart from the universe as its creator. God is what it creates, the unique, infinite, eternal, and unchanging substance to which we ourselves belong along with everything else. The consequence of all of this is that reality as a whole, the ultimate object of our inquiries, is a moving target – all the more so in that the relationship between substance, attributes, and essences proves circular. For they all amount in the end to the same thing in a series of aspectual displacements that lead each round through the others and back again. And this thing is God or Nature itself, unique, infinite, eternal, and unchanging even though it is also characterized by the infinite number of particular things that populate the universe and the infinite number of affections and modifications to which they subject each other.

God or Nature is made known to us through its attributes – through those aspects under which we perceive it, but which we also assign to it as, precisely, attributes. Attributes in turn are made manifest through the essences that define the particular things that arise both out of and under them: the bodies, thoughts, events, and interactions that constitute the world we live in. And yet these essences, as essences, that is, invariant and eternal truths about the things they characterize, are ultimately guaranteed by the one changeless substance from which they spring and to which they return, as parts to whole or properties to the entity they compose. How then can we grasp the totality of what is, was, and ever shall be given that the only means at our disposal are the perishable contents of the body-minds the natural order makes of us? For the ideas, sensations, experiences, memories, insights, and emotions that stock the mind are, as such, products of the substance, attributes, and essences we labour to grasp in the circular steeplechase by which each of Spinoza’s major terms perpetually refers to the next.

The answer is expression. In view of the crucial work it does in the *Ethics*, it may seem odd that Spinoza never explains or justifies the term. It is as though, faced with the task of relating the three key elements of his system, he reached into his verbal toolbox and grabbed the first word that seemed to serve. I believe that Spinoza was too rigorously rationalistic to have settled for that. Defining the term would have seemed tautological since it would have amounted to trying to define “God or Nature” by itself. The term was then explained and justified by the work it turned out to do. And this work consisted not only of describing how substance, attributes, and essences relate to but also how they explicate each other.

Take the paired terms *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. How do we come to know these two parallel attributes of the one substance, God or Nature? We know one by knowing the other because, on close scrutiny, we discover that one expresses the other. *Natura naturans*, as the self-engendering deterministic process by which nature makes nature, manifests itself in the form of *natura naturata*, that is, in the discernible forms of the natural world it makes. Conversely, *natura naturata* reveals its essential properties once we recognize them as being the deterministic expressions of the rational laws that govern the workings of *natura naturans*.

To be sure, we observe a subtle asymmetry here. *Natura naturans* is only known to us through its expressive manifestations as *natura naturata*, as the natural world more or less immediately available to us in the form of the objects and events we encounter in ordinary experience. By contrast, we only begin to understand *natura naturata* once we realize that it expresses causal laws that are never immediately accessible to us except in the form of those direct intuitions into the very nature of things Spinoza calls “adequate ideas” (2p24–49). A peculiarity of adequate ideas as Spinoza defines them is that, possessing the absolute clarity and distinctness of truths grasped *sub specie aeternitatis*, in the light or under the aspect of eternity (2p44c2p; 270), they cannot take the form of things perceived in any other way – by the senses, for example, which are all about the affections and modifications produced both in us and in the things we perceive in the sensory world.

Yet this very asymmetry enables us to move from one point in the steeplechase to the next. Each higher instance in the descending chain – substance in relation to attributes, attributes in relation to essences, and essences in relation to empirical perception – operates as what, citing Spinoza in order to bend him to his own purposes, Louis Althusser termed the “absent” because entirely immanent cause of the effects by which alone it can be known.<sup>10</sup> We know substance through the attributes that express it, attributes through the essences they in turn produce, and essences as the underlying principles that enable us to interpret the data of experience. But this empowers us to ascend the chain once more. Better, it teaches us how to track the chain’s ceaseless self-unfolding along the circular arc of its self-causing and self-explicating relation to itself.

So how does all of this bear on period visual art? Perhaps the best as well as easiest way to begin is in the spirit of chiasmus, by turning the question around to ask how period visual art bears on problems of knowledge. And the answer lies in what may well strike some readers as an unpromising direction: analysis of the contribution that Dutch painters made to the moment of radical transformation and experiment we call the European baroque.

#### 4. The Problem of the Dutch Baroque

As I have argued elsewhere, in distinguished scholarly company, the baroque was itself a signally chiasmic phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> It began, in Counter-Reformation Italy and Spain, with the attempt to reconcile the transcendentalisms of traditional faith in a God-given cosmic order with the grinding social, political, and economic realities that challenged and ultimately defeated them. Paradigmatic from this standpoint was the disorienting double vision Hobbes associated with the contest between the secular authority of the emergent modern state and religious zealots intent on subjugating it to their own, violently conflicting visions of God's will.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand was the world as experimental reason reveals it: a world of material determinisms that demanded we jettison traditional pieties in favour of an instrumental mastery grounded in heartless and, as attested by the doctrine of "reason of state," amoral mechanism. On the other hand was the world as people continued ardently to believe it ought to be: the providential world that God created in token of his benevolent intent.

The baroque then was that moment in European history when these two opposed conceptions of truth stood in precarious equipoise, each struggling to subdue the other by absorptive transformation. Thus Francis Bacon opens his essay "Of Masques and Triumphs" (1625) by sneering at the both symbol-heavy and ruinously expensive royal entertainments he writes about: "These things are but toys, to come amongst such serious observations." Still, as he immediately adds, "princes will have such things" not simply for the childish pleasure they impart but also in order to illustrate and justify their overweening claims to rule by divine sanction. The trick is to strike a balance between the elaborate propagandistic fantasies the emergent state requires in order to create the illusion of a providential mandate with the technical means needed to make the illusion work – if possible without bankrupting the public treasury. As Bacon drily observes, "it is better" that royal spectacles "be graced with elegance, than daubed with cost."<sup>13</sup>

And yet, as Bacon's disabused matter-of-factness suggests, the financial and technical means the state squandered on court theatricals undermined the fictions they were designed to propagate. Moreover, the artifice it took to create them empowered that class of persons like the technocrat Bacon himself who understood the mechanical processes on which they depended. The career of the great Roman sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini drives home the same point. The *Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi* in the Piazza Navona in Rome (1651), designed under the expert guidance of the German polyhistor Athanasius Kircher to allegorize the Church's dominion over the whole world signified by the planet's



four great rivers, drew on mastery of mechanics, hydraulics, and stone-carving as well as encyclopedic learning and iconographic design.<sup>14</sup> Bernini's fountain accordingly stood in ironic dialogue with his carnival play, *The Impresario* (c. 1643): a *commedia dell'arte* romp in which the amorous rivalry between two social-climbing artists crosses with a play-within-a-play staging of just the kind of theatrical extravaganza Bacon made fun of. *The Impresario* comments on its own artifice the better to display its author's opportunistic genius. The contest between transcendental ends and material means was thus weighted on the material side from the start, forecasting the self-administered demise to which the baroque interlude was bound.

How then did seventeenth-century Dutch culture contribute to the baroque? Two things make this question interesting. The first is that, the work of the predominantly Catholic (and strikingly derivative) *caravaggisten* of Utrecht in the decades before 1630 notwithstanding, the obvious answer is that it contributed little if anything to it. Talk of a Dutch baroque involves yet another paradox: namely, that the tradition of early modern European art that seems the least amenable to the questions and methods associated with the interpretation of the baroque was in fact simply a local version of it – how the Dutch simultaneously experienced and intervened in the baroque in their own antithetical style. The second point of interest is that, in showing how, paradoxical as this may seem, there was in fact a Dutch baroque, I will be led to say something not only about the baroque itself but, in the process, about the “early modern subject” as well – the early modern discovery of what I prefer to call person. More specifically, to see what proves unmistakably baroque in seventeenth-century Dutch art will involve looking at what Dutch painters actively made of the so-called subject: by which I mean both how they understood it and how they transformed it – and transformed it in a way and to an effect that inveterate allegiance to the fallen idol of “the subject” not only misses but occludes. If I add that part of what is so baroque about what Dutch painters made of the “early modern subject” lies in the way they came at it through the back door, via the expressive visual objects of which it is made out to be “the subject,” we will also gain a clearer grasp of the chiasmic character of the process of bilateral expressiveness that is this chapter's theme.

## 5. Hoogstraten's *Peepshow* and the Baroque Theory of Vision

So was there a Dutch baroque? As I have just confessed, at least where painting is concerned, we have good reason to think that, in the main, there was not. The northern art of Calvinist Holland appears largely untouched by the exorbitant idealizations with which we normally identify baroque style. Indeed, if we



accept Svetlana Alpers's classic assessment of the Baconian "art of describing" that she lays at the root of Dutch visual culture, Dutch art explicitly rejects the heroic illusions of baroque taste, preferring a faithful record of empirical reality transcribed with as much precision as the prosthetic technologies of contemporary optical science made available.<sup>15</sup>

The anti-baroque implications of Alpers's account of a concerted Dutch descriptiveness are reinforced by later studies. Simon Schama analyses Dutch culture's ineffably *burgherlijk* fusion of materialism and moralism. Richard Helgerson explores the political commitments implicit in Dutch painters' devotion to scenes of middle-class domesticity in more or less open defiance of the sacramental *noblesse* enshrined in the baroque *istoria*. Gary Schwartz documents the frankly commercial pressures to which Dutch painting increasingly answered, and Alpers herself excavates the economic as well as aesthetic ambitions behind what she punningly calls Rembrandt's artistic "enterprise." All of these features of Dutch visual culture evince a climate inimical to the Catholic and aristocratic values informing the paradigmatically baroque cultures of the Italian, Spanish, or Flemish south.<sup>16</sup> True, as Celeste Brusati has shown, Dutch engagement with the demotic world of ordinary experience did not preclude a spirit of wonder, and more specifically wonder at both the illusions art creates and the demiurgic artifice from which these illusions spring.<sup>17</sup> But Dutch art typically adduced such matters in the lowercase dimension of everyday life: giddy as Dutch *trompe-l'œil*s make us, they contrive to keep their feet on the ground.

Take Andrea Pozzo's *Entry of St. Ignatius Loyola into Paradise*, completed sometime around 1707 on the ceiling of the Jesuit mother church in Rome (Figure 8), and juxtapose it with an interior view from Samuel van Hoogstraten's *Peepshow* of 1655–60, a perspective box in the National Gallery in London (Figure 9). The Jesuit Pozzo compels us to lift our eyes programmatically upward to the radiant promise of an illusionistic Life to Come, blowing open the constraining material roof above our heads to lead our astonished gaze to eternity. By contrast, the sometime Mennonite Hoogstraten compels us to bend over in order to peer into the domestic interior his box reveals through the keyhole-like apertures fashioned in two of the box's edges. What astonishes here is the unexpected jolt with which we are brought face to face with a richly textured simulacrum of the outside world that the act of peeking inside the box seems to leave behind.<sup>18</sup> And one of the more remarkable features of this world is a spatial complexity that conforms to the horizontal patterns of ordinary physical experiment. A vestibule opens on rooms leading to still other rooms, or to a hallway whose bright illumination suggests an open door at its end giving onto a garden and a street of houses glimpsed through windows at the back.



Figure 8. Andrea Pozzo, *Entry of St. Ignatius into Paradise* (c. 1707).

Church of St. Ignatius, Rome. Photo: Scala (Art Resource, NY).

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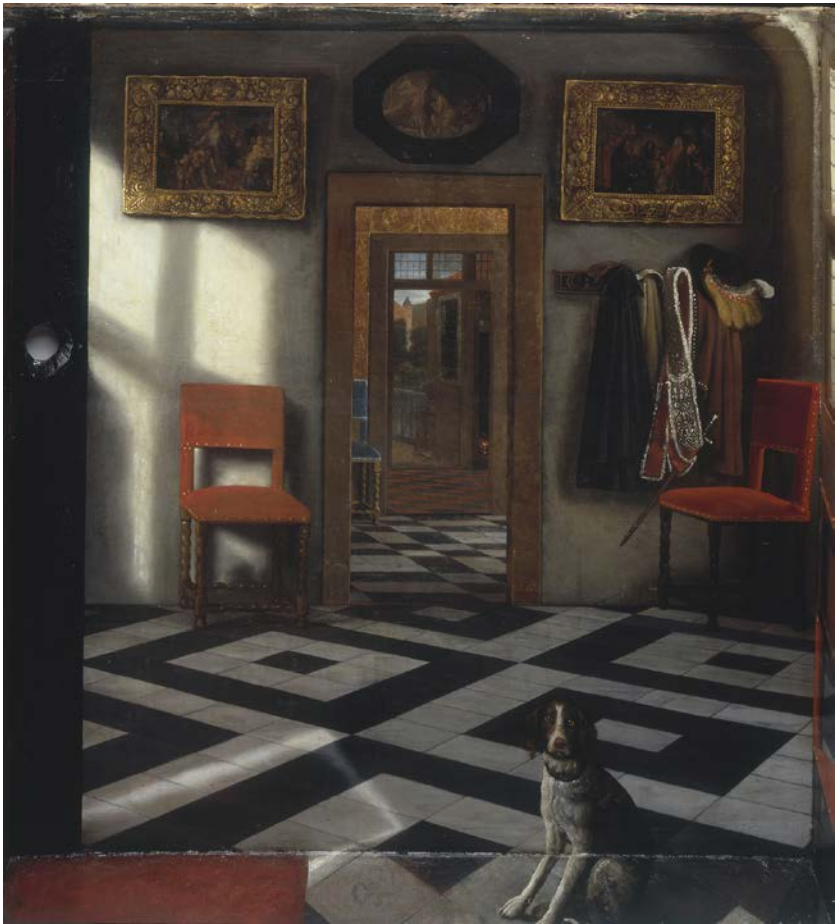


Figure 9. Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Peepshow, interior with dog and aperture* (1655–60).

National Gallery, London. Photo: © National Gallery, London / Art Resource, NY.

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Pozzo's grandiose metaphor of glorious ascent is countered by the prosaic metonyms of urban domesticity, firmly planting us in the realm of everyday life rediscovered where we least expect it, when the faintly illicit keyhole-peek from outside in turns in an instant inside out.

Hoogstraten's optical bait-and-switch occasions a characteristic joke keyed to the dog that returns our gaze from the box's concealed interior. In its dual character as symbol and proof of painting's uncanny fidelity, the dog asserts the artful illusion to which the box subjects us. The startling spontaneity with which we find ourselves beheld in the very act of beholding, or more precisely in which we find ourselves beheld by the product of the act of beholding in which the effort required to peer inside the box enlists us, bears witness to the world-making energies of the painter's craft. And yet, to paraphrase Freud, sometimes a dog is just a dog. Or rather, as we are reminded by the suspicious concern the same animal evinces in a box in Detroit (1663; [Figure 10](#)) for aphrodisiac oysters left carelessly unattended on a sideboard, a dog is always a dog even when art assigns it a role as the symbol of something higher. It is true that the Detroit dog seems to be defending the oysters from the luxurious cat that approaches them on the sideboard. To this extent it may be said to champion the cause of marital fidelity personified (or compromised) by the elegant couple glimpsed arm in arm at the far end of the hall. Yet as every pet owner knows, dogs are nothing if not accomplished hypocrites: defending Master's oysters does not preclude but rather reflects, where it does not simply cover for, the dog's own reprehensible appetites. Just so, hubristic as Hoogstraten's claims for his art may be, they also pay tribute to the cynical habits of which his ironical dogs are etymological vehicles.

Still, to the extent that the question of the baroque focuses our attention in a more or less systematic way, asking it may not be entirely otiose. It certainly helps us think about what Fried would call the "absorptive" intensities we associate with Rembrandt and the introverted, self-referential experience paintings like Rembrandt's *Portrait of Jan Six* (1654) convey ([Figure 11](#)).<sup>19</sup>

As Harry Berger is merely the latest to remind us, Rembrandt paints not just independently of but in opposition to the idealized poses and heroic postures for which the Italian Renaissance set the pattern. Depicted in a moment of private distraction while pulling on a pair of gloves, his face pitted and seamed by advancing age and care, Rembrandt's Six is no martial hero imperiously staring us down. Rembrandt portrays him rather as a man like any other, ennobled (if at all) by nothing more than the activity of thought in which his unfocused eyes show him to be engaged. Rembrandt thereby contests what, to adapt Angus Fletcher's venerable phrasings, we should term the simultaneously cosmic and cosmetic attitude Italian painters devise and the claim to platonizing





Figure 10. Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Perspective Box*, interior (1663). Detroit Institute of the Arts. Photo: Detroit Institute of Arts, USA/Bridgeman Images.

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Figure 11. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Portrait of Jan Six* (1654). Collectie Six, Amsterdam.  
Photo: Collectie Six.

transcendence this attitude transmits.<sup>20</sup> But he does so in the context of, and as an aperture on, second-order complexities that are as baroque as what he challenges. Six's inwardness speaks to inner depths that call out to comparable reflections of our own, deepening the sense of direct physical encounter by giving it the subtle duration of quiet contemplation. Moreover, the face's vulnerable mortality echoes the melancholy *contrecoup* by which baroque sensibility so often compensates for the high-minded delusions of heroic art in the darker modes of *memento mori*, *vanitas* emblems, and post-Tridentine *contemptus mundi*. It is not hard to discern the contours of the skull beneath the pouches of impasto-thickened skin.

As Berger helps us see, the rejection of heroic idealism is bound up with a radical exploration of the ontology of the pose itself. In Rembrandt's hands, the pose is exposed and explicated as the fiction it is. In the process, the dimension of transcendence baroque art posits becomes the self-conscious expression of the imaginary, the unresolvably ambiguous visual field the neo-Freudian Jacques Lacan later makes his own. The fruit of Rembrandtesque againstness, *avant la lettre* yet also verbatim, is a theatrical demonstration of the chiasmic inversions Lacan deploys in the seminars on the Gaze.<sup>21</sup>

But invoking the baroque also underscores the themes of artifice and illusion Brusati's account of Hoogstraten highlights. For one thing, though generally granted a moral and religious significance that Hoogstraten pointedly ignores, artifice and illusion are themselves quintessentially baroque themes. As attested by the scenes and objects it characteristically portrays, the motives shaping Dutch art are indeed stubbornly *burgherlijk* and descriptive – as unheroic and withal as counter-ideal and even amoral as the dogs that haunt the genre interiors that Hoogstraten's perspective boxes display. But the act of turning one's back on the world of illusionistic transcendence Pozzo's enthusiastically Counter-Reformation *St. Ignatius* typifies is neither innocent nor naive. On the contrary, it comments on the underlying ontology Dutch art implicitly shares with the Italian, Spanish, or Flemish models it opposes.

After all, the whole point of Pozzo's illusion is to overcome the immanent world of limiting human embodiment whose sensuous structure it appropriates for eternity's sake. As the complementary cases of Bacon and Bernini already hint, if Pozzo's ceiling succeeds in enlisting the beholder in the Counter-Reformation cause his heaven-bound saint spearheads, it is exactly because it exploits the mechanics of demotic visual experience. It deliberately manipulates ordinary human vision in order to induce the beholder to realize a salvific vision that is in its very nature as strictly and inherently unreal as the illusion that sustains it. Pozzo's *trompe-l'œil* thus participates in the order of things it transcends. More

precisely, the illusion of transcendence instantiates the realm of immanent sensuous embodiment it appears to escape; and it does so moreover as a condition of escape. Conversely, in rejecting the idealist fictions Pozzo's ceiling epitomizes, Dutch art remains faithful (Hoogstraten's dog again) to a world that is in any case the one Pozzo transcends. The Post-Tridentine Pozzo is led by the carnal conditions of human vision to attempt to idealize the real by realizing its ideal antithesis. He thereby grants the ideal access to the world it is called on to redeem. By contrast, his Reformed Dutch adversaries literalize the unedified reality that constitutes the incorrigible element of the very idealizations they reject.

But in doggedly adhering to the demotic world of carnal experience they share with baroque idealists, Dutch painters discover the idealism of vision itself. Though Hoogstraten supplants Pozzo's illusion of transcendence with the strikingly literal experience of immanence the act of peering into his perspective boxes entails, the effect is no less illusionistic, no less deceptive and false, than the one it unseats. What happens when the beholder peers into one of his boxes exploits and dramatizes what also if less obviously happens in our encounters with canvas compositions in that, here as there, we are persuaded to see as real something that finally is not. Further, we see something that passes for real only under the crafty conditions to which vision is subjected in the box, and to that extent in the mind, an entity for which, like the related *camera obscura*, the box serves as a model and metaphor.

This emphasizes a point Alpers makes: Dutch subscription to the Keplerian as opposed to Albertian paradigm of pictorial art.<sup>22</sup> For Leon Battista Alberti and the southern theoretical tradition he inaugurates in his *De pictura* of 1435, the source of painterly illusion lies in reproducing the structure of spontaneous acts of vision. True, as Erwin Panofsky documented many years ago in his book on the centrality of the Idea in Renaissance art, a lesson adumbrated by many scholars since, the tradition to which Alberti subscribed maintained that, even though painting is defined first and last as the "imitation of nature," great artists capture far more than immediately meets the eye.<sup>23</sup> This is indeed, as we saw in [chapter 1](#), the thought behind the distinction Nicolas Poussin draws in his correspondence between "aspect" and "prospect": between the persons, scenes, and actions that form painting's direct content and the guiding "invention" or insight governing the work of selection, composition, and meaning that content expresses. As David Summers memorably puts it, while the medium invoked by the Renaissance "language of art" may be visible nature, what makes it moving, inspiring, and above all beautiful is not.<sup>24</sup> In the words of the French neoclassicist Roger de Piles, the aim of painterly imitation is to avoid the "poverty of ordinary nature" by portraying nature "rectified" in light of her

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underlying “intention.” “Truth” in art is thus “more true than Truth itself,” for it purges nature of the disfiguring defects of contingent visual experience.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, as Alberti insists, painting remains a visual art, committed as such to depicting “things seen” – things therefore whose visibility is in some sense naturally given. This being the case, its object must be to portray them *as* seen, that is, in the form in which we naturally meet them in ordinary experience. Painting is accordingly modelled on the natural fruits of vision it represents in the shape of naturally visible objects. In Hoogstraten, by contrast, we witness a characteristic turn, the chiasmic inversion implicit in the formula Johannes Kepler’s *Ad Vitellionem paralipomena* (1604) lays at the base of northern optical science: *ut pictura, ita visio*, as in painting, so in sight.<sup>26</sup> From Hoogstraten’s point of view, Alberti has it exactly backwards. If painting mimics natural vision with such disorienting pertinacity, it is because vision itself is just another mode of picturing.

Such is the thrust of a remark in the *Inleyding tot de Hooge Schoole der Schilderkonst, anders de Zichtbaere Welt* of 1678, the treatise Hoogstraten devoted not only to the academic theory of painting but, as the second part of his title indicates, to painting’s rigorous correlate in the nature of the visible world itself. According to the *Inleyding*, the visible world of natural experience is not in fact an autonomous given to which representation more or less faithfully conforms; it is instead “our everywhere present masterpiece.”<sup>27</sup> Visible nature is the product of a process of mental picture-making, and it is this process rather than nature itself that painting at once counterfeits and precipitates. In peering into one of Hoogstraten’s perspective boxes, you are in effect peering into your own brain – the more inescapably in that, on the Keplerian (but also both Cartesian and Lockean) view Hoogstraten endorses, what you see in the box (or seem to see in the box) is quite literally what happens in the brain with which art interacts.

When he published the fruits of the “experimental method” detailed in his *Treatise on Human Nature* of 1738–40, David Hume could still propound a paradox that, on this occasion at least, he was confident even his most hidebound philosophical colleagues would endorse. It is “very natural” for us to assume that the things we perceive as surrounding us in the world are in fact those very things. This is, however, a mistake common to

all the unthinking and unphilosophical part of mankind, (that is, all of us, at one time or other) and consequently such as suppose their perceptions to be their only objects, and never think of a double existence internal and external, representing and represented. The very image, which is present to the senses, is with us the real body.<sup>28</sup>

What we see when we perceive some external object is not, as we are tempted to conclude and as ordinary language has it, the object itself but rather the image or idea we form of that object in our minds. This fact – and Hume held it to be one, proved by the experiment of scrupulous attention to what happens when we look at anything around us – may surprise the unwary and unlearned. But it came as no surprise to painters, or at any rate not to painters like those of Hoogstraten's Holland, deeply imbued as they were in the “philosophical” as well as artistic exploration of the optical grounds of their art. Painting mimics nature by mimicking what it shares with nature: the fact of being a brain event of the sort a perspective box triggers the moment you peer through one of its inviting apertures.

It should be clear just how baroque this is, and in what. Hoogstraten does not moralize the experience in the way devotional verse and drama will, articulating the kind of soteriological message embedded in the anamorphoses that painters like Caravaggio or Rubens devise. Nevertheless, his perspective boxes propose a version of the “life is a dream” motif. They also offer a beautiful example of what Deleuze identifies as a central emblem of baroque culture at large: *le pli*, the chiasmic pleat or fold by which inner and outer, “subject” and “object,” mind and body, salvific spirit and natural flesh, engage in an interminable dance of substitutive replications.<sup>29</sup> And what in fact is a perspective box if not a member of the family of invaginated spaces by which, for Deleuze, the external world of baroque sensibility is perpetually turned inside out – as grotto, chamber, monad, crypt, or skull?

But Hoogstraten's boxes further point to the baroque potential of the very feature of Dutch art that distinguishes it from what we normally take for baroque: the descriptiveness to which Dutch painters doggedly reduced the idealizations of the Catholic south even when they mimicked or incorporated them. Like Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait as the Apostle Paul* (1661; Figure 12), where painting gestures towards a hidden light source whose face-to-face revelation in the eternal life to come will destroy both the work of art and the world that work embodies, Hoogstraten's boxes are what Stanley Fish calls “self-consuming artifacts.” Where the uplifting illusion of Pozzo's *Entry* constitutes a persuasive rhetorical manipulation of the sensuous forms and appetites it serves, Hoogstraten's boxes enact a dialectical appeal to rational mind. And the vehicle of this appeal is our enlistment in a characteristic error the image encourages us to make, the better to turn on and demolish it.<sup>30</sup>

In the Rembrandt, this error consists in our initial captivation by the moving natural truth of the beautiful face that meets us at first glance: a face however that, in keeping with the accompanying iconography that identifies it as St Paul's, goes on to replace itself with something other than what we start with.

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Figure 12. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait as the Apostle Paul* (1661).

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Photo: courtesy of Rijksmuseum.

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For if we follow the right-to-left orientation sketched by the portrait's tired myopic gaze, abandoning the Hebrew text the saint has been reading in order to turn towards the source of light above and behind him, we learn that its real truth lies elsewhere. The picture lifts our gaze from the immanent carnal world it mirrors and inhabits towards the transcendent world from which true light comes: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor 13.12). In Hoogstraten, meanwhile, the error consists in the expectation that the image's concealment in a box engenders: the sense of discovering something rare, precious, and secret only to come face to face with the world we have inhabited all along. But the result is in either case the same. We arrive where the artist intends us to just insofar as we learn to see through the illusions art simultaneously dramatizes and exposes in confronting us with the self-deprecating irony encoded in the symbolic yet comical dog that forms Dutch painting's cynical signature.

## 6. The Dialectics of Beholding

Which brings us back to the central thread of my argument. Thanks to the dialectical drama of beholding by which it appeals to a critical mind made conscious of the role it plays in creating the illusions in which art trades, Dutch painting introduces a Deleuzian *pli*, a monadic pleat or fold, in the demotic fabric of things. Dutch art, and especially Dutch genre painting, announces its inescapable subservience to the dimension of monistic immanence – the world of Paul's dark glass as of Hoogstraten's at once loyal and (as witnessed by its tell-tale taste for oysters) ineffably venal pet. Yet plain-speaking Dutch descriptiveness thereby raises questions of its own, keyed to what, following Spinoza's lead at least in this, period philosophers call "intellect" and the pure "intuitions" by which intellect is supposed to distinguish itself from the acts of perception and imagination with which art nonetheless shows it to be inextricably entangled.

A hallmark of the pictorial experiments this stimulates is the peculiar way in which Dutch genre painting engages the beholder in order to explore the curious difference beholding makes to the experience of art: a difference however all the more telling, and all the more tellingly baroque, for being equated with the errors it commits and the nothing into which those errors resolve. With the singular, at times quasi-judicial citation of beholding, everything changes. And yet the ultimate meaning of this change lies in the fact that nothing in fact has changed. In consuming itself in error, beholding reveals the world to be what it was all along – the theatre of monadic immanence from which there is no escape.

We get a preliminary sense of what I am after by evoking a famous thought experiment devised by the aesthetician Arthur Danto in a book that (given our present purpose) bears a suggestive title, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*. The experiment occurs in the context of the subfield of aesthetics known as ontology of art. Danto reflects on the “being” of art, something inextricably bound up with the problem of the status of individual artworks and what happens when we look at them. In order to concretize what he takes the case to be, Danto imagines the exhibition of a collection of, in every sensible respect, identical squares of canvas, painted red: a collection of what Scholastic philosophy, in a series of textbook problems topically revived by Deleuze’s hero Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, calls “indiscernibles.”<sup>31</sup>

In the Schools, one point of the example of indiscernibles was to isolate the contribution of “quiddity,” of demonstrative whichness, to determining the form or substance of entities qua entities. Though identical in every other regard, indiscernibles are distinguished (and therefore distinguishable) in deictic terms, as “this” or “that.” This red square is distinguishable from that one inasmuch as it just is this one as distinguished from that. But Danto goes on to remind us that, at least where artworks are concerned, in addition to being physical objects, our indiscernibles are artefacts – the products of some particular, culturally located person’s labour, choices, and intentions, inscrutable as these may be.

This yields the terms of his experiment, which not only exhibits the objects themselves but adduces their intentional histories. So Danto’s first square, entitled *Israelites Crossing the Red Sea*, is said to present a parody of traditional canons of pious history painting: inspired by an ironic aside in Kierkegaard, the artist portrays neither the escaping Hebrews, nor Pharaoh’s pursuing chariots, but the moment when “the Israelites had already crossed over, and the Egyptians were drowned.” A second image, called *Red Square*, is “a clever bit of Moscow landscape,” let us say a suprematist composition of the Malevich era enigmatically satirizing the Stalinist status quo. The third picture is a defiant piece of abstract art also called *Red Square*, albeit with a different ironic emphasis from the last, while the fourth is described as “a still-life executed by an embittered disciple of Matisse, called ‘Red Table Cloth.’” While nothing in the squares themselves distinguishes one from another, once each is presented in the perspective of the individual history formed by the conditions of its making in the artist’s context, aims, and affiliations, we can in fact tell a difference. The squares are not the same even though they are just the same; each is, if you like, the difference of the same.<sup>32</sup>

In Danto, the experiment supports a theory of representation one of whose later points of focus is the conceptualist gesture artists like Marcel Duchamp and Jim Dine perform in exhibiting real things (a table, bed, or urinal) that just

are the things they are (a table, bed, or urinal), and yet become something more than that the moment they are exhibited in an art gallery or museum, complete with a title ("Table," "Bed," "Fountain"). The mere thing thereby becomes a representation of the thing it is and, what is more, of its own conceptual status as a representation, and thus of the difference representation makes.<sup>33</sup> We can already make out the difference this might make for the Dutch art of describing. A similar thought lies behind the joke incorporated in Hoogstraten's dog. In instancing representation construed as faithful replication, the dog contrives to insinuate a distinction underscored by the fact that the first thing that meets you on peering into the London perspective box is just a dog expectantly looking back. The comic deflation of the symbolisms of southern allegory ironically "discovers" or unveils its own artfully artless insignificance. And is this not also what Hoogstraten's treatise drives at by adducing the constituents of the visible world as the "masterpieces" of natural acts of vision that, far from simply registering their objects' existence, actively create them in the way natural philosophers from Descartes and Locke down to Hume and Kant argued they do?

But we can go deeper, as, I believe, Dutch genre painting regularly does, by noting the role beholding plays and the difference beholding makes. In Danto's example, in and by invoking the distinctions a supposed composition history suggests, the beholder makes the difference he or she is led to adduce. Michael Baxandall notes as much when he asserts that, for all they may seem to confirm the readings we advance, we never in fact interpret paintings themselves at all, but rather paintings "under descriptions" of the sort Danto's histories propose.<sup>34</sup> Knowledge (more specifically here, the fiction of knowledge) of a painting's history constitutes the object whose visibility it assures. Whatever you saw before the story was told – and Danto's experiment is designed to make this as near to nothing as is humanly possible – what you see in the upshot is something else again. And the new object hovering into view is your work to the precise extent that the story Danto tells induces you to see it.

This insight favours, in explicit response to Danto, the Fishian claims the rival aesthetician Joseph Margolis makes on the basis of meditation on interpretation itself. One may certainly draw on controlling knowledge of the history of a work's making and the artist's intent in composing it. But even disregarding the extent to which matters of making and intent are themselves subject to interpretive construal (a Freudian psychoanalyst will conceive such matters far differently from a Marxist, a high modernist, or a post-Lacanian feminist), this is by no means the only reading we may offer. Nor is there any guarantee that we will draw like inferences from the same historical picture – even Marxists quarrel about what follows from the constructions they share. So while Margolis

agrees that the most salient fact about a work is that it has a history, that history includes not merely or even primarily the circumstances of its making but rather those defined by its evolving uptake. Paintings have histories because we read them differently – so radically that the being postulated by the ontology of art is a Protagorean flux as mutable and multiform as the ephemeral “men,” the historical readers of either sex, who are its “measure.”<sup>35</sup>

Beholding is never neutral or passive even when it tries to confine itself to what literally and immediately meets the eye. Such is the testimony of the history of the titles that, mining the conventions used in compiling inventories of art collections, the positivist strain of art history has left us as a reflex of the laudable yet misguided because foredoomed attempt to describe without construing. *Head of a Young Girl, Self-Portrait in a Linen Cap, Rembrandt as an Old Man Laughing*, or, to cite the object with which this chapter will close, Hoogstraten's *The Slippers*, also called *Perspective of a Dutch Interior Viewed from a Doorway* – all of these titles bear the mark of the serio-comic vicissitudes by which scientific disinterestedness is beset as a function of the pressing interests that dog our efforts to hold them in check. But whence too, in contrast to these strong constructivist views, the at once formal and historical claim I want to venture here. Dutch genre painting is not only subject to the history of beholding that Margolis, Baxandall, and Fish variously evoke; it anticipates it. And it is in this that it proves most unmistakably baroque.

Historical corroboration comes from a text whose publication is almost exactly contemporaneous with that of Hoogstraten's *Inleyding* of 1678 – the text with which this chapter opened, Spinoza's posthumous *Ethics* of 1677. It is tantalizing to note that scholars have suggested, though on shaky because non-documentary grounds, that Hoogstraten composed a portrait of Spinoza; and certainly there is a portrait by Hoogstraten that superficially resembles authenticated likenesses of the philosopher.<sup>36</sup> Still, I know of no evidence that Hoogstraten ever met the distinguished Marrano, still less that he read (let alone understood) the *Ethics* and the relation it can be shown to bear on problems encountered in visual art. But the point here is not to cite Spinoza as an authority or source for painting. I invoke him rather for his testimony to a certain potential endemic to the broader cultural context he and the painters shared: an insight whose incidence in the philosopher suggests its availability to other, less exacting inquirers as well. In this perspective, though no direct link can be drawn between Hoogstraten and Spinoza, it is nonetheless suggestive that, as we will see later, the painter visited with members of the Royal Society during a five-year sojourn in England. Thus, while he may never have met Spinoza himself, he almost certainly conferred with Henry Oldenburg,



secretary of the Royal Society and, in that capacity, a regular liaison between Spinoza and Boyle.

Whatever his general significance may be, Spinoza remains a special case as both a philosopher and a Marrano. As Yirmiyahu Yovel beautifully argues in *The Marrano of Reason*, the first of a two-volume study of Spinoza's thought and philosophical descendants, Spinoza's status as the pre-eminent exponent of at once the philosophy of immanence and the philosophical uses of irony (the two are, as we have seen, intimately related) is demonstrably conditioned by his unique situation as an exiled Jew. Spinoza was indeed a doubly exiled Jew, anathematized as a heretic by his own ethnic community within the largely but still not uniformly welcoming commercial culture of the Dutch Golden Age.<sup>37</sup> Spinoza's capacity to think through the perspective of immanence and to practice the iconoclastic ironies with which that perspective is fraught is to this extent unreproducible and accordingly hard (if not impossible) to transfer.

Yet insofar as the atmosphere of at least relative toleration afforded by Dutch culture left him free to think his thoughts, and even publish them, albeit in heavily coded (because ironical) form, his Dutch as well as Jewish origins count for something. If nothing else, they indicate precisely the kind of cultural potential that enabled him – unlike his fellow exile, heretic, and ironist, the French Huguenot Pierre Bayle – to remain in the land of his birth. And they also help explain how, apostate Jew though he was and, with the publication of his *Theologico-Political Treatise* in 1670, target of heated public accusations of atheism, Spinoza managed to secure a loyal following in Dutch literary and intellectual circles.<sup>38</sup> His existence, notoriety, and above all survival vouch for pervasive mental possibilities we can also see in contemporary Dutch painting, an art, as we have noticed, preoccupied by problems of immanence in its own right. Nor should we overlook, where Hoogstraten is concerned, not only shared contacts with the Royal Society but also a common interest in optical science. The fact that Spinoza both studied optics and ground lenses to earn a living made pictorial experiments like Hoogstraten's perspective boxes as relevant to his researches as the painter's discussions of optics in the *Inleyding* show the philosopher's work to have run parallel to his own.<sup>39</sup>

In any event, one of the pleasures as well as hardships we experience in reading the *Ethics* is grappling with the second-order complexities of thought and utterance alike. Deleuze captures this feature of the *Ethics* in the following passage from his book on Spinoza's practical philosophy:

The *Ethics* is a simultaneous book written twice: once in the continuous flow of the definitions, propositions, demonstrations, and corollaries that develop its great

speculative themes with all the rigour of the head; and again in the broken chain of its scholia, a discontinuous volcanic chain, a second version beneath the first, which expresses all of the author's heartfelt anger and propounds the practical theses of denunciation and liberation.<sup>40</sup>

On the one hand, we have Spinoza's strictly theoretical enterprise: the effort to realize the Cartesian ideal of a purely and exhaustively logical derivation of necessary truths *more geometrico*, in the systematic sequence of axioms, definitions, propositions, lemmas, proofs, and corollaries that constitutes the main body of his text. This represents Spinoza's properly philosophical achievement. The care with which he punctiliously enumerates the steps his argument takes dramatizes the relentlessly disciplined unfolding of what necessarily follows from the perspective of immanence announced in the guiding watchword, *Deus sive Natura*, "God or Nature." The irresistible chain of mathematical reasons enacts the ontological (and therefore moral) consequences of the radical reduction effected by the equivalence of theocentric and naturalistic perspectives on the world. The rebarbatively fastidious rigour of Spinozan demonstration thereby forecasts the curious mental suicide that concludes the resulting ethics: an act of intellectual self-immolation consummated in Spinoza's second major formula, *amor Dei intellectualis*, whose ambiguous genitive fuses the human person's sacrificial love of and for God with God's love of and for himself in his infinite freedom from parochially human interests and concerns (5p36; 378).

But on the other hand, at irregular and therefore unpredictable intervals, we have moments where Spinoza lets the mask of philosophical *ataraxia* slip. Such is the force of the memorable appendix to part 1, where Spinoza's maniacally patient, inch-by-inch articulation of the monistic equivalence of God and Nature gives way to a furious assault on the idolatrous multitude by whom his earlier *Treatise* was blindly condemned. It is here, for example, that he openly attacks the finalist doctrines his system discredits and replaces. He asserts not only that "Nature has no fixed goal" of the sort finalism supposes but that the "final causes" to which philosophers and theologians cling "are but figments of the human imagination" (240). It is also here that he ridicules finalist belief in "natural ends" on the grounds that it "turns Nature completely upside down, for it regards as an effect what is in fact a cause, and vice versa" (240).

Nor does Spinoza stop there. In righting the inversion of cause and effect finalism entails, he is led on to a series of concomitant perspective shifts of the kind we noted at the start of this chapter – chiastic reversals in which we discern, two centuries ahead of schedule, what can only be described as

a Nietzschean genealogy that “transvalues” the conventional pieties in whose name the ignorant vilify his ideas:

When men became convinced that everything that is created is created on their behalf, they were bound to consider as the most important quality in every individual thing that which was most useful to them, and to regard as of the highest excellence all those things by which they were most benefited. Hence they came to form these abstract notions to explain the nature of things: Good, Bad, Order, Confusion, Hot, Cold, Beauty, Ugliness; and since they believed that they are free, the following abstract notions came into being: Praise, Blame, Right, Wrong. (241–2, translation slightly altered)

Similarly, in the scholium to proposition 2 in part 3, we get the destruction of what Spinoza sees as the greatest delusion of all, the faith in free will subtending the dualist divorce of body and mind:

A baby thinks that it freely seeks milk, an angry child that it freely seeks revenge, and a timid man that he freely seeks flight. Again, the drunken man believes that it is from the free decision of the mind that he says what he later, when sober, wishes he had not said. So, too, the delirious man, the gossiping woman, the child, and many more of this sort think that they speak from free mental decision, when in fact they are unable to restrain their torrent of words. So experience tells us no less clearly than reason that it is on this account only that men believe themselves free, that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined; and it tells us too that mental decisions are nothing more than the appetites themselves, varying therefore according to the varying disposition of the body. (281)

Yet it is essential that, though taking the form of a “double séance” of the sort Jacques Derrida later popularizes, Spinoza’s *Ethics* remains one text. The passionate eruptions that drive Spinoza’s logical enterprise from beneath just are that enterprise: the two faces or dimensions of his text compose what we have already called a difference of the same. What the text as a whole calls us to attend to is its own doubleness and the shifts in perspective, in modes of beholding, that this doubleness enjoins. The *Ethics* is very exactly a self-consuming artefact. It continually sets us up for sudden changes in perspective in which we are shown to be wrong. But in showing us to be wrong, it teaches that the underlying source of error is just our habitual way of seeing things and the truth of our own natures therein revealed. The whole point of the exercise, both its condition of possibility and its goal, is to compel us to acknowledge that the entire system of conventional moral belief is a collection of fantasies, delusions,

and prejudices spawned by our inveterate habit of perceiving everything in relation to our own low partisan interests.

Like Pascal's unfinished *Apology*, the *Ethics* offers a path to salvation. However, the route Spinoza maps for us does not, as in Pascal, lead to some higher, more perfect plane of existence where everything that is wrong with us will be healed by subsumption in the revelation of divine preordination. It directs our attention back to the realm of monistic ordinariness we have inhabited all along. The point in short is the one Wittgenstein makes in an early text of his own devoted to the same therapeutic program, a text that bears a deliberately Spinozan title, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*:

6.53 The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e., propositions of natural science – i.e., something that has nothing to do with philosophy – and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. Although it would not be satisfying for the other person – he would not have the feeling we were teaching him philosophy – *this* method would be the only strictly correct one.

6.54 My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.<sup>41</sup>

In Spinoza as in Wittgenstein, the world we learn to see is the world as it was before – just the same, albeit transfigured by the finally unpronounceable difference introduced by the gesture with which Wittgenstein closes his book: “Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen” – Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

## 7. The Place of the Beholder in Dutch Genre Painting

It is in this light that I propose to revisit Dutch genre painting, or at least, as I have said, a certain potential in Dutch genre painting. This potential emerges in the characteristic ways in which Dutch painting engages the beholder and, in doing so, raises questions not only about the nature of beholding itself but about its own status in the field of beholding as a reflex of the work beholding is shown to do.

Hooqstraten's *The Anemic Lady* of 1667 (Figure 13) offers a refined example in the mode of parlour comedy. A pale young woman is seated in a chair in

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Figure 13. Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Anemic Lady* (1667). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.  
Photo: courtesy of Rijksmuseum.

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the immediate foreground while her father (or perhaps husband) and a doctor earnestly scrutinize a bottle of urine in search of a diagnosis. Though the cause of her complaint is clearly mysterious to the two men, the beholder has little trouble spotting it. The young woman's faintly yet unmistakably sardonic gaze across the picture plane makes direct eye contact in such a way as to intimate the true nature of her condition. By apostrophizing us in our character as a bystander unremarked by parent and physician, she enlists us in complicit awareness of the morning sickness indexed by the telltale presence of a lascivious cat with a mouse caught between its paws and the painting of a reclining Venus on the wall beside the open door in the back. The young woman's gaze supplies the subtext that eludes her male companions, granting us in the process an active role as lover, bosom friend, or a mother far less likely to be taken in than the men so rapt in humoral symptoms that they overlook the patient herself. As Bryan Wolf might put it, though doctor and father know how to look for the kind of evidence medical science needs, they have not learned how to *see* – a business Dutch art often hints is best left to the care of women, and the artists who frequent them.<sup>42</sup>

Or consider Jan Steen's *Young Woman Offering an Oyster*, also called *The Oyster-Eating Girl*, painted sometime around 1658–60 (Figure 14). In contrast to the gentlemanly tact Hoogstraten exercises, what hooks us here is the picture's robust explicitness and the work of explication this explicitness pointedly makes possible. As indicated by the arousing oyster tendered in the young woman's avid, agile fingers and by the transaction conducted with the procuress in the background, the picture's setting is a brothel and its subject an alluring prostitute. Moreover, in presenting its young prostitute with a candour whose measure is the knowing frankness with which the girl accosts us, the painting identifies with her: a fusion emphasized just by the kind of descriptive title the absence of any alternative more or less compels us to give. The painting is what it represents, namely, what we call it: a "young woman offering an oyster," with a view of a client and a procuress in the murky depths beyond. And insofar as this painting – like any painting – propounds a statement about the nature of the art it embodies, as Steen here images it, painting confesses the lurid erotic undertow contemporary Dutch iconoclasts decried.<sup>43</sup> The young woman's business is pleasure, and pleasure of an unmistakably commercial as well as carnal kind. But pleasure is painting's business too, what the painter contracts to provide in the expectation of getting paid for it, as the term of an exchange whose very form is the image itself.

But in making a meal of its own simultaneously venal and venereal basis, the painting makes a spectacle of the beholder as well. Steen's young prostitute is hardly a passive object of ocular consumption. On the contrary, and with





Figure 14. Jan Steen, *Young Woman Offering an Oyster* (1658–60). Mauritshuis, The Hague. Photo: courtesy of the Mauritshuis.

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all the power of her fathomlessly ironical gaze, she actively apostrophizes him (the male pronoun is hard, though not impossible, to avoid) as the unequivocal recipient of the delights she both tenders and incarnates. The painting thereby exploits the chiasmic structure latent in all visual art, which is also, if more tacitly, the chiasmic structure of vision itself.

Edward Snow and Harry Berger make the point in drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the "intentional" form of visual relation – Snow directly and Berger by way of the nothing if not baroque development Lacan gives Merleau-Ponty's insight.<sup>44</sup> Building on his earlier *Phenomenology of Perception*, one of whose core themes is excavating the body's place in human perceptual acts, Merleau-Ponty's posthumous *The Visible and the Invisible* explores the manifold ways in which the world's visibility to us is a reflex of what remains invisible, namely, the intentional act we perform not just in seeing something but in seeing it as being the very thing it is. When I look, for instance, at the round, flat stone I use as a paperweight on my desk, I see not only the bare thing it is but *what* it is: a stone I chanced to pick up one morning while walking the dog in Larz Anderson Park in Brookline, Massachusetts, and carried with me as a keepsake on taking up a new academic position in Colorado. The stone accordingly has a history; and even though I rarely think of that history, it forms an integral part of the object I handle when I write.

Just so, Steen's painting invokes us as a function of the kind of attention we pay, of the body that is attention's vehicle, and of the habits, memories, and appetites that infuse our interest: something possible just because our normally unmarked and therefore invisible attentive presence grants the visibility the picture now turns back on us as its source.<sup>45</sup> In the unanswerable pertinacity of the girl's knowing and inviting gaze, the picture pinpoints and unmasks the ambiguous desires that bring us to the scene. The concupiscence that painting candidly embodies in the person of Steen's prostitute challenges our own – a challenge all the more palpable for the fact of our undeniable collusion in a spectacle in which we are as it were undressed by the image whose hire we transact.

Albeit in an incomparably more moving and elusive way, the same structure is put in play in Jan Vermeer's *Head of a Young Woman with a Pearl Earring* of c. 1665 (Figure 15). Such is the thrust of the gesture with which Snow opens his account of this picture. As he notes, a dominant theme in scholarly responses to – or, more coolly, appreciations of – this painting is the supreme beauty of the young woman's face. But as Snow immediately adds, focus on the face's beauty effectively distances it in a way that is precisely contrary to the peculiar energy with which it engages us in ungarded contemplation. The fact however is that, so long at least as we just look at the picture without trying to articulate an

appreciative account of what we see, we cannot distance it this way. Whatever subtext we may supply for the woman's gaze, we are its recipient, fixed in the urgent present of the complex emotions with which her face is imbued. The result, as Snow insists, is that seeing and feeling fuse in potent yet protean union. To look at the face is to feel for it; and feeling in turn enforces still deeper, more searching attention in a restless eternity whose form is just the sudden yet ceaseless instant of the image itself.<sup>46</sup>

That this should be so is in part a product of the absence of a stabilizing context capable of directing and resolving our interest. In the version of the theme of the *Love Letter* (c. 1669) housed in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (Figure 16), Vermeer goes to a lot of trouble to put the beholder in the frame. However innocent or criminal we may conceive the missive passing from maid to mistress (or mistress to maid) to be, there remains the sharply delineated doorway and the curious passage or closet through which we look as the letter changes hands: a penumbral space whose contingent clutter demands that we ask ourselves just who we are supposed to be if this is how the exchange comes to our notice. By contrast, in the *Young Woman with a Pearl Earring*, a kind of tunnel vision is at work. All we get is the head, presented as the exclusive focus of the passionate regard the painting extracts from us in a form consonant with what impassioned attention would see to the exclusion of everything else – the head, the turn, the gaze, the half-open mouth, and the quickening breath of passionate arousal the mouth betokens.

The effect is also due in part to the ambiguity of the woman's expression – an ambiguity that, the melodramatic conventions of the Cartesian system of expression the French neoclassical painter and theorist Charles Le Brun proposes notwithstanding, is as such the expressive mark of the emotions it simultaneously transmits and obscures.<sup>47</sup> What, we wonder, does the woman herself feel? More specifically, does she desire or fear us? And where, and with what intent, does she turn? Is it towards us, in answer to our own unexpected arrival on the scene, or in response to some word or call or cry her imminent departure wrings from our own parted lips? Or is she in fact turning away from us on the point of leaving us behind? And if the latter, is the emotion her face conveys one of the sort of pity Snow imagines, mingled with the pain of renouncing an embrace she too desires? Or does she flee the unwelcome violence of a need she does not share but that the ambiguous intensity of her gaze mirrors back to us as we look?

There is of course no answer to any of these questions because any and all would equally fit the bill. But this accounts in turn for the deepest source of the unique pressure and immediacy of our involvement with the face: the fact that its terms are as much a function of what we bring to the encounter in looking



Figure 15. Jan Vermeer, *Head of a Young Woman with a Pearl Earring* (c. 1665).  
Mauritshuis, The Hague. Photo: courtesy of Mauritshuis.

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Figure 16. Jan Vermeer, *The Love Letter* (c. 1669). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.  
Photo: courtesy of Rijksmuseum.

at it as the face does in looking back. Whatever his aim in painting this picture, Vermeer has created an image whose power to enchant springs from its power to recreate itself in the field of our imagination of the scene. The face is to this extent an effect of transference, but a transference it extorts from us whether we desire it or not, yet which it also refuses to answer, withholding the consummation so compellingly at hand. Depending on how we construe the relation the image evokes, we get a different picture. Nevertheless, though always different, the picture remains impossibly the same. The painting becomes its own indiscernible. Nothing distinguishes the contrasting shapes that our shifting sense of the face and of our own passionate investment conspires to produce except the nothing that is beholding itself.

Let us now turn to one last cluster of images indexed to a painting Hoogstraten composed sometime between 1654 and 1662 whose very title (assuming it was meant to have one) confirms its relevance to the problematic addressed here (Figure 17). According to Helgerson, taking his cue from the curators of the Louvre, where the painting hangs, the title is *The Slippers (Les Souliers)*. According to Brusati it would be better known as *Perspective of a Dutch Interior Viewed from a Doorway*.<sup>48</sup> The first title picks out a detail central to the interpretation the title-giver proposes. The empty slippers on the oval-shaped straw mat at the threshold of the open door across the hall betoken the woman who left them behind in eloping with a lover. The slippers serve then, as Helgerson puts it, “more obviously than any other detail in the painting” to “suggest a story,” but a story to which the interpreter is committed by the topic of the book in which he offers it. Helgerson’s interest is conditioned by the theme of the middle-class home and the “adulterous alliances” by which, in early modern culture, the domestic scene, and in particular the bourgeois interior, becomes the theatre of the political allegiances and resistances precipitated by the extending reach of the emergent modern state. By contrast, the second title seems more neutrally descriptive and accordingly takes more of the picture in – or, if you prefer, leaves less of it out. Yet it too is topically overdetermined in that perspective and Hoogstraten’s quasi-scientific experiments with it form one of Brusati’s presiding concerns.

I accept both titles, and so neither. As I see it, the picture is a deliberate puzzle, and its solution a joke very like the one the London *Peepshow* plays on us. True, the erotic symbolism notoriously current in Dutch art is everywhere. We observe empty slippers, a trousseau of keys heavily dangling from a lock, the picture on the far wall of a woman who seems to be reading something (a letter perhaps, the breaking of whose seal might portend an act of sexual congress otherwise elided), the snuffed candle of forgotten righteousness, the neglected





Figure 17. Samuel van Hoogstraten, *The Slippers* (1654–62). Louvre, Paris.

Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

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broom of domestic duty, and finally, if the unimpeded light-stream coming in from the right is anything to go by, no fewer than three open doorways. All of these cues strengthen both Helgerson's story of irregular passion and Brusati's conviction that the perspective Hoogstraten defines for us affords "a provocative peek into a Dutch boudoir."

And yet a feature of such readings is that they both see too much and see too little. They see too little in that, despite Brusati's addition of the theme of Hoogstraten's multiform experiments with perspective, they perceive what the conventions of Dutch genre painting would lead us to expect: a demotic Dutch interior enlivened by sexual innuendo. But Hoogstraten has, I believe, inserted other possibilities that merit notice. For instance, assuming that the woman in the painting at the back does in fact read something, is it safe to conclude that it is a letter, and thus a *billet doux* whose unsealing mimes the sexual act to which it invites the recipient? If we adhere to the mindset associated with the model for this picture that Brusati has found in Gerard ter Borch's *Gallant Conversation* (also sometimes called *The Paternal Admonition*) of c. 1654 (Figure 18), the answer would be yes since that is surely the kind of thing ter Borch would have made of it.<sup>49</sup>

Yet as interesting as Hoogstraten's incorporation of ter Borch's model are his departures from it. For example, ter Borch's painting features a hectoring male and a seated female chaperone who, absorbed in sipping wine, seems (or pretends) not to notice what is going on. And who exactly is the man involved and (another way of asking the same question) who is the young woman herself as defined by his identity and the relation this assigns her? One of the picture's titles would have it that he is her father. But given his comparative youth, he might just as well be her husband, brother, lover, or pimp, thereby identifying the young woman as a wife, sister, mistress, or whore.

But however we read these figures and the various questions they raise, Hoogstraten eliminates the male and turns the elderly woman into a watchful servant awaiting her mistress's orders. Above all, the red canopy that, in ter Borch, covers (and foregrounds) a bed has been replaced by a construction whose elaborately pointed top suggests an oriental tent – a fashionable accessory of contemporary Dutch bed design perhaps, but one whose precise function is left strikingly underdetermined. Instead of standing for a conventional young woman lending an ear to the sexual temptations to which a wicked world exposes her, or being scolded for having done so, assuming she is not some country girl newly arrived in the big city, bullied into turning tricks to earn a living, might not the painting's heroine become the very different (if still both widespread and sexually potent) figure of Judith, the Biblical heroine we met earlier in Caravaggio's company? For Judith, we are told, marked her





Figure 18. Gerard ter Borch, *Gallant Conversation* (c. 1654). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Photo: courtesy of Rijksmuseum.

widowhood following her husband Manasses's death by fasting in a tent set on the roof of her house (Judith 8.5), leaving it only, in the company of her maid, once she had pledged to avenge her people by killing the Assyrian captain who oppressed them (10.1–5). The far room may indeed be a typical Dutch boudoir; but precisely because its provocative contents remain concealed from the viewpoint Hoogstraten has painstakingly constructed for us, we cannot tell whether the deed its open door suggests takes place outside the house or in, or whether the deed evoked is a deed of love or a deed of blood.

And what, finally, about this viewpoint – that is to say, our viewpoint – itself? As with his perspective boxes, Hoogstraten makes us conscious of our situatedness. The perspective into the enigmatically open, empty, yet perhaps also secretly occupied room beyond places us in a space at once physically and psychologically contiguous with the one into which it invites penetration only to deny it. Does this not in turn potentially assign us an active role – as jealous husband, prurient neighbour, pious iconoclast, or lurking killer? And would not this explain the murky urges that stimulate our curiosity and thus the choices our interest leads us to make in sorting through the clues laid out for us?

But in discerning how Helgerson and Brusati see too little in Hoogstraten's picture, we also make out how they see too much. Precisely because it bristles with hints of the sensational things we would discover if only we could peer around one of the many corners the composition puts in our way, the painting dramatizes what we cannot see from the position it has so carefully prepared for us – which is pretty much everything. In what amounts to an ironic commentary on Hebrews 11, a Pauline text the erstwhile Mennonite artist may very easily have had in mind, the evidence of things seen in the picture becomes the evidence of things unseen.<sup>50</sup> But unlike the ones Paul urgently presses on us, the invisible things Hoogstraten seems to want us to look for are all down here. As Brusati notes, one of the many surprising features of this picture is that no living being is present, not even a dog. But is this strictly accurate? Do we not rather glimpse ourselves busily rearranging the furniture in pursuit of a missing referent we ourselves supply in the form of our own overactive imaginations? The point finally is the one Spinoza would make, underscored by the defeat to which the picture not only condemns us but directs interpretive attention. Far from deriving our reading from the evidence the painting provides, we constitute that evidence as an expression of the interests, anxieties, and desires we bring to the business of looking. Whatever Hoogstraten did or did not intend, this is our own masterpiece, adorning the monadic chambers of our own minds.

## 8. Imagination and the Experiment of Expression

And yet is the matter quite as one-sidedly “subjective” or “ideal” as this account suggests? To be sure, to cite an idea Hoogstraten advances in the *Inleyding* during a discussion of what painters can learn from a careful study of optics, the illusionism that sets painting apart from all other arts consists of tricking the beholder’s eye into deceiving itself by inducing it to see something that is not really there.<sup>51</sup> If painting succeeds in this, it is at bottom because, as early moderns of every stripe agreed, empiricists as much as their idealist adversaries of a Berkeleian or Kantian persuasion, the faculties of perception and imagination are functionally identical.

As Kant explains in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781; 2nd ed. 1787), perception is in the first instance the work of the senses, imagination that of reproduction. This is indeed what allows the latter to create as it were the quasi-perception of things that are not actually there. However, in reproducing the objects of the senses, imagination synthesizes the manifold of pure sensory impressions in such a way as to produce a wider intelligibility unavailable to the senses as such. As we noted earlier, vision is not just the perception of bare things, whatever exactly that might be. It perceives coherent – in Kant’s terms, synthetic – individuals grasped as unities that combine all of the properties delivered to each of our five senses at once, together with the personal histories and associations that enable us to recognize them as being the specific individuals they are. Insofar then as perception is not the mere mechanical reception of sensory impressions but is instead the “productive synthesis” involved in perceiving determinate things, the faculty that perceives is the same as the one responsible for the phantom visions of hallucination and dream.<sup>52</sup>

Spinoza was especially adamant that the intuitions of which true knowledge is composed, the “adequate ideas” that apprehend things in the light of eternity alone capable of revealing their true natures, have nothing to do with imagination. They are precisely not the kind of mental entities most of his contemporaries understood “ideas” to be: mental images judged by their greater or lesser resemblance to the things they were held to represent. “For nobody who has a true idea,” he writes,

is unaware that a true idea involves absolute certainty. To have a true idea means only to know a thing perfectly, that is, to the utmost degree. Indeed, nobody can doubt this, unless he thinks that an idea is some dumb thing like a picture on a tablet, and not a mode of thinking, to wit, the very act of understanding. (2p43s; 268–9)

Images, for Spinoza, were “affections” of the mind as fundamentally passive as the emotions to which the generality of human beings are helplessly in thrall. He was in this sense ready to extend to the supposed “primary” qualities – size, number, shape, motion, and position in space – the same speciousness early modern philosophers generally reserved for “secondary” qualities like colour, temperature, or taste. But, in a real sense, this was Hoogstraten’s point as well. If perception is, as we have already quoted him as claiming, “our everywhere present masterpiece,” it is because it is a figment of an imaginative faculty that creates all objects of sense, real or not. And how else do we explain our engrossment in a painting like Hoogstraten’s *Slippers*, the essence of which is the earnest pursuit of a truth that is not there?

Unpacking this final paradox is a two-step process. At a first level, it calls for recognizing yet again Gassendi’s point that the world appears only insofar as it appears to creatures like us. The world as we know it is a product of the psychophysical dispositions contained in Spinoza’s *conatus*, the inborn drive to live and grow that makes the world matter. What we see then, as we see it, is an index of who and what we are, beings with needs, interests, histories, and habits of our own. But by the same token, in the second step, what we are is in the end what the world makes us since we remain part of the natural order. Though the world as it appears to us is only the world as it appears *to us*, the world as we discover that it does in fact appear tells us about the world itself. And it does so to the extent that, reflecting on these things in the way the rational faculty with which we have also been endowed allows us to, we refuse to be deceived in the way Hoogstraten’s paintings show we nonetheless typically will.<sup>53</sup>

We return by way of conclusion to Spinoza’s notion of expression.

A feature of the elaboration of Spinoza’s formal theory of knowledge in part 2 of the *Ethics*, a feature shared with its counterpart in Descartes’s *Meditations*, is that it largely advances through negation, by critically dismantling the pseudo- or at any rate confused and inadequate knowledge offered by empirical appearances. Even the series of propositions devoted to the analysis of adequate ideas, those pure intuitions we have just seen Spinoza set in heated contrast to the imagistic representations most other writers called ideas, proceeds for much of its length by unmasking their misleading lookalikes. The articulation of his theory of the three types of knowledge human beings are capable of accordingly begins with the lowest. This is the kind derived either from “casual experience” of the “individual objects presented to us through the senses in a fragmentary (*mutilate*) and confused manner without any intellectual order,” or from the signs or symbols we share with others, language, letters, and the rest, leading us to “imagine things” we do not actually perceive even by direct sensory means.

To knowledge of this first kind he gives the names “opinion” and “imagination” (2p40s2; 267). It is then only by contrast with this first type of knowledge that he defines a second, higher type, which comes into play once we cease merely gawking at the objects of sense, imagination, and opinion and impose intellectual order on them by actively reasoning about them (2p40s2; 267): a process that eventually leads to the third and final stage, fully discussed only in part 5 with reference to the intellectual love of God.

It would seem to follow that images of the sort painting traffics in are not only radically different from but fundamentally inimical to the formation of adequate ideas. Quite apart from their status as representations of the necessarily mutilated data of unmediated sensory experience, pictures violate all of the criteria Spinoza identifies with true knowledge. They do not, for example, portray things in the light of eternity and, as a result, contravene Spinoza’s claim that “it is not in the nature of reason to regard things as contingent, but as necessary” (2p44). For, as Spinoza goes on to remark, “it solely results from imagination (*imaginatio*) that we regard things, both in respect of the past and of the future, as contingent” (2p44c1; 269). And indeed the merest glance at Hoogstraten or Vermeer, Rembrandt or Steen, suffices to confirm what Spinoza might well describe as their enslavement to “casual experience.” Insofar as it commits itself to portraying the mutilated fragments of daily visual encounters in the world of the senses, the time of the spatial art of painting is the discontinuous present of contingency itself. Painting is from this standpoint pure *deixis*, presenting this isolated portion of the world glimpsed in this time and place, under this light, and with just these persons, animals, and objects in attendance.

Given these views, it may come as a shock to run across the following in the scholium to part 2, proposition 17, on the way the mind assigns predicates of actual existence and immediate presence to the external things that affect it in some way: “I should like you to note that the imaginations of the mind, looked at in themselves, contain no error; i.e., the mind does not err from the fact that it imagines” (257). True, what Spinoza gives with one hand he takes away with the other. For error arises the moment the imagination persuades the mind that the things it imagines, whether in the mode of sense perception or in that of any of its close cousins, memory, say, or opinion as well as hallucination and dream, are well and truly there as it perceives them. Whatever the things we experience in daily life may be in reality, their truth is as such solely available to reason and the train of pure intuitions it prepares the mind to form. It therefore bears no resemblance to the shapes in which imagination presents them.

And yet the concession is there just the same: “the imaginations of the mind, looked at in themselves, contain no error.” For they are, precisely, expressions of the mind, of the body whose interactions with the world cause its thoughts

and perceptions, and of those other bodies whose impact on our own exacts the tribute we pay them in the form of our perceptions, emotional reactions, curiosity, and concern. Spinoza's concession accordingly sheds an unexpected light on activities of which he would otherwise have seemed to disapprove. The readiness with which Hoogstraten's art deceives us tells us a great deal about our personal investment in the images that do so. But it also reveals much about the things of which they are images if only as an expression of the impact such things exert in the wider fabric of reality, and for a start on ourselves as beholders.

Berger draws a related lesson in his study of seventeenth-century Dutch still lifes, and in particular what he disarmingly calls "snackscapes": depictions of food and drink of every conceivable kind for which Dutch art lovers displayed a thirst whose scale is measured by the hundreds of images artists produced to slake it (Figure 19).<sup>54</sup> The riddle Berger tries to unravel is, why? What induced both the public and the painters who served it to develop so extravagant a fascination with edibles and drinkables? What in short did they see in them?

One thing, linked to Schama's account of the "embarrassment" of the worldly riches the Netherlands' spectacular commercial success showered on its inhabitants, was a topical mode of the *vanitas* trope: a display of delectable items whose moral office it was to remind us of their transience and of our own sinful mortality. Whence, in the picture reproduced here as an exemplar, the display of aphrodisiac oysters and the presence of sliced bread, a smattering of lemon peels, and broken nutshells, not to mention the elongated turkey neck adorning the as yet unopened pie – telltales of carnal appetite and the fleshly excesses that so readily lead us to forget the fate that awaits us after death. And yet, to succeed even in pointing out pious morals like these, the provender that Berger's snackscapes offer must be genuinely tempting. If your mouth does not water and your hand does not itch to reach out upon the feast, the lesson misfires, leaving you puzzled rather than enlightened. As no less an authority than Augustine of Hippo taught, Christians need to distinguish between those things that, like love of our Maker, love for our neighbour, and citizenship in the City of God, are goods in and of themselves and those other things, like food, drink, or sexual pleasure, that are good only in terms of the use to which they are put, as carnal means to spiritual ends.<sup>55</sup> But even those things whose goodness is defined by the pious uses to which we put them are nonetheless *good*; nor would they prove so appetizing were they not.

The oysters Steen's prostitute offers us, the inscrutable look that Vermeer's woman with the pearl earring turns in our direction, the enigma that Hoogstraten concocts out of little more than a series of open doors, corners we cannot peek around, and a pair of empty slippers not only bring out those features of





Figure 19. Pieter Claesz, *Still Life with Turkey Pie* (1627). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Photo: courtesy of Rijksmuseum.

our natures that readily respond to invitations like these; they draw attention to what makes them inviting. Though it demands the at once rational and critical reflection both Spinoza and Augustine urge in order to learn how to use it, the experimental imagery through which we first encounter God or Nature just is the world inasmuch as it instances the process by which the world manifests itself to us in the process of making us what we are. Hoogstraten's *Slippers* would not provoke so much curiosity had he composed it in any other way. Nor would Steen's oyster-eating girl arouse us as she does were she not a fitting object of the slaving desire (or violent disgust) she triggers.

Hoogstraten and his wife moved to England in 1662, remaining there until 1667. During his stay, the painter met with members of the Royal Society and painted a number of pictures, in particular "perspectives" of various kinds, which attracted the attention of, among others, Samuel Pepys.<sup>56</sup> The length of Hoogstraten's sojourn, the company he kept, and the paintings he produced all speak to the intense exchanges between artists and natural philosophers that typify the high culture of the moment.<sup>57</sup> But though, given the character of his work, it is easy enough to understand Hoogstraten's interest in experimental optical science, it may seem less obvious what piqued the curiosity of English natural philosophers.

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I think the answer lies in the, in every sense, experimental nature of works like *The Slippers* as well as the London *Peepshow*. The perspective box directly illustrates, and experiments on, the mechanics of visual experience. Especially given the skull-like structure within which a richly complex visual environment appears the moment we peek through one of the box's apertures, it presents something like an optical Visible Man capable of modelling the visual processes at work in the human brain. But the box also has an outside that Hoogstraten adorned with a series of elaborate allegories (Figures 20–2). A consistent theme of these allegories is surely, as both Brusati and Thijs Weststeijn point out, the worldly goods painters can expect to earn from their work.<sup>58</sup> Hoogstraten himself earned and clearly relished them. The *Inleyding* advertises the fact as an inducement to others to follow his example; and Brusati acutely notices the rebus-like signature formed by various items left about in the vestibule guarded by the interior's dog: a letter addressed to the author lying on the floor near a chair and, hanging from pegs by the front door, a plumed hat, an expensive coat cut in the latest fashion, and an ornamental sword marking the gentlemanly honours bestowed on Hoogstraten during his stay at the science-mad court in imperial Vienna.<sup>59</sup> However, animating these allegories, and so orienting their symbolic valence, is the figure of Eros: the personified desire for fame, riches, and sex that, as Spinoza teaches, makes these things goods in the first place. As further attested by the looming, faintly sinister shadow of a man trying to peep through one of the interior's bottle-glass windows (Figure 23), presumably in hopes of catching a glimpse of the doubtless lovesick woman asleep in a bed just visible elsewhere in the box (Figure 24), desire is the engine that drives the entire enterprise.

It is the intersection of art, desire, and science that ultimately explains Hoogstraten's appeal to members of the Royal Society like Robert Hooke and Pepys. In the process, this intersection helps us put a finger on the underlying source and meaning of what Matthew Hunter, citing the eighteenth-century art historian, man of letters, and politician Horace Walpole, calls the "wicked intelligence" informing the fusion of visual art and scientific experiment in Restoration London.<sup>60</sup> As Hunter documents in sumptuous detail, Hooke in particular earned Walpole's forceful disapprobation. He seems indeed to have been a thoroughly reprehensible figure. Quarrelsome, devious, venal, and thoroughly unscrupulous in the often unacknowledged use he made of other people's work, and given besides to nourishing unwholesome, crypto-alchemical fantasies of exploiting natural philosophy to harness occult powers in the service of personal as well as intellectual ambition, he was as wicked as he was brilliant.<sup>61</sup> But of course Hunter's target is less Hooke himself than what Hooke represented: whatever it was in Restoration experimental science that made even eminent, rational gentlemen like Walpole angry and ill at ease.



Figure 20. Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Peepshow, exterior (Gloria Causa)* (1655–60). National Gallery, London. Photo: © National Gallery, London.



Figure 21. Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Peepshow, exterior (Lucri Causa)* (1655–60). National Gallery, London. Photo: © National Gallery, London.



Figure 22. Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Peepshow, exterior (Amoris Causa)* (1655–60). National Gallery, London. Photo: © National Gallery, London.

The erotic allegories adorning the exterior of Hoogstraten's perspective box offer the clue. As Bacon famously taught, and Galileo and Descartes alongside him, the governing aim of knowledge is power. Power first of all over nature, enabling human beings to better their physical circumstances and condition by changing them in whatever ways seem fit. But also power over other people and the institutions people create to channel and control the dynamisms that the societies humans form engender and express. However, power as early modern experimentalism in all of its facets taught – private, political, and artistic as well as philosophical – is an essentially amoral phenomenon – as amoral as the natural desires that stimulate its pursuit and as the natural mechanisms through which it can be made to operate on our behalf.

Such is the lesson of Hooke's notoriously unethical behaviour when Leibniz presented the Royal Society with his calculating machine as a gift for its collection. Rather than put the machine in a display case in the respectful way Leibniz expected, Hooke dismantled it to see how it worked.<sup>62</sup> As Leibniz protested, Hooke's aim was transparently piratical. Through reverse engineering, Hooke

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Figure 23. Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Peepshow, interior with voyeur* (1655–60).

National Gallery, London. Photo: © National Gallery, London/Art Resource, NY.

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Figure 24. Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Peepshow, interior with sleeping lady* (1655–60). National Gallery, London. Photo: © National Gallery, London.

sought not merely to understand the device but to appropriate it by improving on Leibniz's design. As witnessed moreover by another contemporary German visitor appalled at what he took to be the lamentable state of the curiosities in the Society's keeping, the aggressive iconoclasm evinced by Hooke's treatment of Leibniz's calculator appears to have characterized the spirit in which the Society handled pretty much all of the objects in its care. Like the corpses of anatomists, the animals dragooned into Boyle's pneumatic experiments, or the gems painters turned into pigment or alchemists into chemical solutions, and regardless of whatever moral, figural, or aesthetic properties baroque encyclopedists like Leibniz or his Rome-based Jesuit compatriot Kircher attached to them, the objects in the Society's collection were to be manhandled and, if

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necessary, destroyed in the interest of practical as well as factual knowledge.<sup>63</sup> And what justified this desecration was the fact that they all were in the end mere natural things devoid of meaning or purpose independent of the uses to which people chose to put them.

To return to our Dutch painter, Hoogstraten may well have composed a companion to his *Inleyding* intended to balance insight into the “visible world” with some vision of the “invisible world” of the spirit the first book set aside. The fact remains that no such book has surfaced; nor do we have any real notion of what it might have contained. We have instead the *Peepshow*’s unapologetic celebration of the entirely worldly goods the art of painting could command. And art owed its remunerative power to mastery of the world itself in all the appetizing materiality of money, sex, and fame. What makes the experimental intelligence displayed by figures like Hoogstraten, Hooke, or indeed the heretical Spinoza appear so wicked was thus the way its artful manipulations of mental and physical reality alike shed genuinely empowering light by showing the world itself to be as purposelessly real and so as morally unscrupulous as the desires it stimulates in us. As Spinoza understood, desire tinges everything it hits on. But it also underscores the mutually expressive relation between the people it inspires and the objects on which it focuses their energies. We will never learn what (if anything) lies concealed in the room across the hall in Hoogstraten’s *Slippers*. Nevertheless, curiosity would have no meaning were there nothing for it to busy itself about – a truth all the more palpable in the present case just because our frustrated desire looks very like its own absent cause.

All of which leads to one final point. As we saw in [chapter 1](#), in pursuing the “symmetrical anthropology” that enables him to anchor the analysis of modern natural science in the broader cultural contexts in which scientists actively practice what they preach, Bruno Latour challenges what he takes to be the founding principle of Western modernity: the *double partage* or double divide that set the worlds of nature and culture, and so of fact and value, radically apart as poles of unbridgeable opposition. Over against this view, Latour argues that we have in fact “never been modern” in this sense. For even our most rigorously epistemic activities are themselves, as such, facts of culture. As a result, the materials on which they operate, the objects they produce, and the instruments they use are “hybrids” in which nature and culture are discovered to inform each other all the way down.<sup>64</sup>

A question nonetheless remains: what do Latour’s hybrids actually look like? The artistic experiments of the Dutch Golden Age supply an answer: they look, quite simply, like anything and everything to which human persons turn with interest or concern. It is not just that there is no radical distinction between

culture and nature, knowing and using, fact and value, “subject” and “object,” human and non-human. All form part of the single seamless whole by which each side turns out to be the dialectical condition and precipitate of the other. For we are as much a figment of the natural order as the world of natural things that it is a core function of human work, thought, and experience to make manifest to us in the only way they can be – as figments of the cultured imagination whose form as well as product is the living work of art.



## Chapter Three

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# Persons and Portraits: The Vicissitudes of Burckhardt's Individual

Inspired by the wickedness with which the last chapter closed, let us briefly return to the crime scene we visited in the introduction, the third act of Molière's *Don Juan*. As legend demands, act 3 ends with the visit to the tomb of the commander, killed in a duel provoked by Don Juan's rape of the man's wife. This brings on the scene in which the title character issues the fateful invitation to dinner that speeds his way to Hell. He addresses the invitation to the portrait statue that adorns the tomb, an act of verbal vandalism in keeping with the don's iconoclastic stance towards the moral norms society cherishes. Indeed, Don Juan's first glimpse of the statue elicits sarcasm: "Parbleu le voilà beau, avec son habit d'Empereur Romain" – Damn me, but his Roman Emperor's costume suits him.<sup>1</sup>

For all his insolence, Don Juan is thoroughly invested in the statue's symbolism. The monument's meaning is just what he takes it to be. The portrait of the dead commander is the dead man to the life, right down to the old-fashioned pomposity of his Roman garb. The statue makes good on its implicit claim to posthumous persistence: the don acknowledges the identity it confers beyond the grave not only by recognizing the likeness but also by skewering the dead man's ludicrous self-importance. The memorial is charged with honouring the commander as having been the noble soldier he liked to imagine he was while alive and now intends to be remembered as being in death. And insofar as memory constitutes a mode of survival, who the commander was is who he remains: at once the hero his mourners commemorate and the pompous ass Don Juan ridicules.

Needless to say, the fact that the dead commander is portrayed by a life-size statue serves the play's purposes as well his family's. It supplies the actor rigged out for the part with the material support needed for the nod with which he accepts Don Juan's invitation and for the return visit where he issues an invitation of his own. But at bottom the stage trick works because, as a portrait, the

statue stands in for, and so as, the man it represents. Though it takes a miracle of stagecraft to enable the statue to act on this founding assumption, the likeness is the person it portrays. By extending his insolent invitation to dinner, Don Juan decrypts both the memorial message and the dead man himself in just the way the portrait's iconic symbolism requires.

We first encountered the underlying logical principle guiding this chain of events in [chapter 2](#): it is the one the Jansenist logicians Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole articulate in the passage of the *Art of Thinking* (1683) devoted to establishing a rational foundation for the orthodox Catholic interpretation of the words of consecration in the Mass. To cite their example, people are quite right to say, as they commonly do, that the "portrait of Caesar is Caesar," just as a map of Italy is Italy.<sup>2</sup> The statement is not of course literally true anymore than it is literally true to say that the bread with which the rite of consecration begins is the body of Christ with which it ends. The actual thing to which we give Caesar's name only represents him. Nevertheless, inasmuch as the point of a representation is to evoke in the viewer's mind an idea whose referent just is Caesar, it grants the kind of real presence Arnauld and Nicole claim for the Eucharistic host, and by exactly the same token: representation represents, if only in the form of the image it calls to mind.

As the Jansenists' Huguenot adversaries were quick to point out, there is an element of superstitious magic at work here – an atavism redolent of idolatry, of pre-modern ancestor worship, or of childish fright at the life-likeness of dolls.<sup>3</sup> Still, in challenging the notion that the kind of enlightened modernity we oppose to a mentality like this ever properly existed, Bruno Latour reminds us of an important fact. Rational insistence on an essential split between sign and referent, between the cultural contrivances that enable us to point to, name, or portray the inhabitants of the natural world and the "mere real things" that cultures appropriate by symbolic means, is deeply misleading.<sup>4</sup> After all, the very idea that the natural world could ever be devoid of cultural meaning is itself, as such, a work of culture, and in particular of the culture Don Juan champions in the mode of cynical disenchantment. The statue then is not simply a block of stone shaped to look like the dead commander. By virtue of the likeness that enables us to distinguish it from other objects of its kind, it just is the commander because that is what it is meant to be. And that is in fact what, for all his impious modernity, Don Juan treats it as being, to an effect no less real for the cultural mediation involved. We can underscore the point from another direction by observing that the commander doubtless was the pompous ass Don Juan takes him for. As the pragmatist C.S. Peirce would put it, by parading the martial pride he displayed in life, the commander's portrait betrays the all-too-human character flaws that got him killed.<sup>5</sup>

The scene contextualizes the problem of the art of portraiture that forms this chapter's theme. It does so by locating portraits in the life-world in which they appear, for which they were designed, and thus of which they constitute potent as well as pertinacious expressions. Portraits are not the lifeless objects that semioticians are often inclined to see in them in order to subject them to what they take to be properly scientific analysis – a method of analysis independent of the human environments in which portraits arise except insofar as those environments can themselves be subjected to scientific reduction.<sup>6</sup> Resistance to this kind of reduction prompts Peirce, perhaps the greatest and certainly earliest modern semiotician, to place them in the family of “icons” granted the power to betray as well as parade the human interests, needs, desires, and fantasies they serve.<sup>7</sup> Like all icons in Peirce's sense, portraits are at once modes and triggers of cultural practices of the sort the scene from Molière instances. In the scene itself, Don Juan's dehumanized materialism is brought face to face with the cultural order he mocks; and that order does not simply evaporate just because he sees through it. Portraits serve as symptoms of the deeper and more pervasive patterns of thought, feeling, and experience alone capable of making sense of them. The fact that a portrait should play the role it does in Molière's comedy indexes a great deal more – and for a start the emergence of person as a major category of early modern perception, conduct, and understanding.

This brings us to a point the great nineteenth-century Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt was the first to make with the emphasis it deserves. The clearest and most incontrovertible sign that something epoch-makingly new had happened in early modern Europe was the advent in Renaissance Italy of the figure Burckhardt called “the individual.”

It is characteristic of Burckhardt's moral and aesthetic as well as professional *habitus* as a vestigially Protestant, German-speaking man of letters that, when he turns to the historical “development of the individual” in the second part of *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, and again later in part 4's account of the Renaissance “discovery of man,” the chief exemplars in which the individual is said to have achieved its most signal and complete expression are poets, scientists, craftsmen, and scholars.<sup>8</sup> The heroes of his story are Dante, Petrarch, and Tasso, Pico, Alberti, and Aeneas Sylvius, Cellini, Cardano, and Leonardo – but Leonardo the polymath engineer rather than the painter and art theorist. It is telling however that, in its 1950 reprint of the Middlemore translation of 1878, the London art house Phaidon appended one hundred illustrative plates, a full third of them portraits. In one sense the portraits Phaidon's editors added to the text serve a merely auxiliary function. What could be more natural than to append portraits to a book that has so much to say about Renaissance individuals? Yet, at another level, the appendix bears witness to the book's special

interest to art historians, and so to what, inspired by Burckhardt's picture of Renaissance culture, art historians felt they could, precisely, add to it. For, once you think of it, the clearest and most incontrovertible sign that the individual stood at the heart of the epochal change Burckhardt chronicles is the veritable avalanche of portraits of every sort that early modern Europe produced from the fifteenth century on.<sup>9</sup>

Whether in Italy itself or in Italy's Netherlandish sister at the far end of the Rhine-valley trade routes to the mercantile north, we get large-format portraits of the princes of state and church and smaller, more informal ones of the officers, scholars, and merchant bankers who administered, enlightened, and enriched the societies these princes ruled. We get donor portraits, group portraits, and the signature portraits artists slipped into their works by depicting themselves as, say, members of the attendant crowd at a nativity or coronation. We get wedding portraits, portraits of vanished loved ones, and miniatures for carriage on one's private person, together with portraits of people we still recognize and others of people whose identities are lost to us. We get portraits intended to flatter and others meant to draw some obscure yet plainly invidious moral at the sitter's expense. Moreover, as multiform as portraits themselves are the media in which they were executed: canvases, panels, and murals wrought in tempera, pastels, and oils; etchings, engravings, and woodcuts; sketches and drawings in charcoal, ink, silverpoint, and lead; portrait busts in marble, lime-wood, and polychrome terra cotta; full-length statues of figures on foot, enthroned, or on horseback cast in bronze or carved in stone. And to all of these were added coins, medals, and commemorative plaques as well as the literary analogues to which Burckhardt was drawn: verbal portraits, character books, biographies, memoirs, funeral orations, dedications, and odes, not to mention the encomiastic sonnets and spiritual autobiographies the Swiss historian especially admired.

So much is obvious, even blindly so. It is odd then to reflect that the phenomenon passed largely unnoticed until Burckhardt gave art historians the clue needed to explain it. Connoisseurs and art theorists had commented on and valued portraits before the scholarly tradition Burckhardt helped inaugurate. For instance, there is the praise of Rembrandt's portraits that appears in the midst of a critique of what the neoclassical French theorist Roger de Piles's *Digest of the Lives of Painters* (1699) presents as the Dutchman's crudely naturalistic enslavement to what the book elsewhere calls the "poverty of ordinary nature."<sup>10</sup> Piles excoriates Rembrandt for abandoning the noble Ideas by which great artists not only surpass but "rectify" the natural imperfections of "mere present things." Yet he concedes that he "made a large number of portraits endowed with surprising force, suavity, and truth," paintings that resemble his

exquisite etchings in the skill with which they “express both the flesh and the life.”<sup>11</sup> It is also true that, during André Félibien’s secretariat, and with the example of the leading court portraitist Charles Le Brun before their eyes, the members of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture ranked portraiture second only to history painting in the hierarchy of forms, leaving landscape, genre vignettes, and still life far behind.<sup>12</sup>

It is important, though, that the Académie’s promotion of portraiture coincided with the political as well as cultural apogee of their absolutist master, the Sun King, Louis XIV. Portraiture had a crucial role to play in the state program Peter Burke aptly describes as the “fabrication” of Louis XIV: a concerted effort to create images of the king embodied in hundreds of portraits disseminated to every corner of the realm.<sup>13</sup> The promotion of portraiture to this extent reflected the ideological use to which it was put. In a picture like Le Brun’s *The King Governs by Himself* (1684), executed for the ceiling of the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles to commemorate the young monarch’s seizure of personal power in 1661, portraiture is recast in the mode of history painting itself (Figure 25). Le Brun does not simply take down Louis’s likeness as a mortal man, the sort of thing that was seen to make Rembrandt a lesser artist despite the force, suavity, and truth he achieved. Instead, in the guise of an allegory so recondite that it required both an inscription and a voluminous iconographic key to be understood, he reenacts the epic deed with which, in pursuit of the eternal glory the sovereign alone could conceive, Louis took the helm of state in his own godlike hand. Portraiture’s subservience to the highest aims of art is confirmed by the lengths to which the artist had to go to ensure that the picture was seen not merely as a contingent likeness of the empirical man but as restaging the heroic act of will by which that man transcended his natural identity to become his own inimitable icon, Louis le Grand.<sup>14</sup>

It was not then, and could not have been, till Burckhardt propounded his theory of the Renaissance individual that portraiture emerged as a central focus of systematic scholarship. Yet whatever portraiture’s fortunes in early modern theory may have been, the huge number of portraits that have reached us show it to have occupied an outsize place in early modern practice. And a constitutive theme of that practice was the figure Burckhardt called the individual. He also called it Man, as Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola defined him in the famous oration on his dignity of 1486 that Burckhardt quotes in the conclusion of his chapter on Man’s Renaissance “discovery.” But Man here takes the form of what, laying the basis for the Romantic theory of the symbol, Immanuel Kant calls hypotyposis, a general idea that reveals some deeper, supersensible dimension of its essence by coming to be embodied in the mould of a sensuous particular.<sup>15</sup> In Burckhardt’s citation of Pico, the





Figure 25. Charles Le Brun, *The King Governs by Himself* (1684). Hall of Mirrors, Chateau de Versailles. Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

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individual personifies that species of which each specimen contains the “germs of universal life” within itself as the expression of the gift of divine understanding that defines its very humanity.<sup>16</sup>

It is nonetheless crucial to note, as Lionel Gossman does, that Burckhardt’s picture of the Renaissance individual bears the unmistakable stamp of the period in which he forged it.<sup>17</sup> The new cultural personage Burckhardt described is a distinctively nineteenth-century invention shaped by two related contrasts: that between each individual and every other, and that between the individual and “the mass.” Dating from the Renaissance, persons like those depicted in portraits stood apart both in their own, minutely characterized singularity and from the great, undifferentiated crowds of lesser mortals. This explains not only Burckhardt’s gravitation towards illustrious men and (occasionally) women, together with the chiefly literary means they used to present and explore their private identities, but also the role princes, and especially Renaissance despots, played in at once modelling and triggering the development. Burckhardt’s prototype was supplied by those individual political strivers who shouldered their way to the centre of attention: the Viscontis, the Sforzas, the Borgias, and the Medici, flanked by lawless *condottieri*, mercenary generals who seized the opportunity princely dissension provided to usurp states of their own. Riches, fame, and power beyond the human norm were what even poets pursued, more often than not to the exclusion of the legal and moral constraints by which “the people” remained bound.<sup>18</sup> Though Burckhardt has curiously little to say about him even in his chapters on despots and the “demoralization” to which unbridled individualism led, the presiding spirit of much of his account is the Niccolò Machiavelli of *The Prince* (1532) rather than the *Discourses* (1531): the theorist of amoral aggression rather than the Republican virtues his commentaries on Livy defended.

The result was the paradigmatically nineteenth-century tension Burckhardt’s sometime junior colleague at the University of Basel, Friedrich Nietzsche, canonized in his portrayal of the *Übermensch*: the superior being set in lonely isolation high above the resentful mob of those too weak to achieve genuine autonomy.<sup>19</sup> Seen in this light, Renaissance culture as a whole was reduced to the status of a picturesque backdrop against which even the reform-minded populist Girolamo Savonarola was fated to become a crazed despot like any other.<sup>20</sup> As Hayden White observes in his survey of the forms of mythic emplotment that the major nineteenth-century historians devised to make sense of the increasingly volatile historical experience of their own era, Burckhardt was at bottom a satirist whose private disenchantment cast a saturnine gloom on the human condition.<sup>21</sup> Outside the “circle of chosen spirits” inhabiting the Platonic Academy of Medici Florence or the legendary court of Urbino eulogized by

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Baldassare Castiglione, the enlightened modernity Burckhardt sees in the Italian Renaissance ultimately destroyed itself. Debilitated by the anarchic individualism that made it possible, it had no defence against the invasions that reduced Italian city states to foreign vassalage, the political and artistic as well as doctrinal reaction that set in following the Council of Trent, or the triumphant materialism of modern natural science, the modern economy, and the predatory empires created by the great nation states by which Renaissance Italy was partitioned and devoured. In this perspective, ironical withdrawal from the stage of public events was the only answer, grounded in the realization that human things never amount to much in the end, especially where collective experience is concerned. The individual as the Italian Renaissance modelled it may indeed bear the germs of universal life within it, but only when held at an esoteric remove from the terminally senseless turmoil of historical process.<sup>22</sup>

Still, even in Burckhardt, the individual he identified above all with princes and sonneteers is an inescapably relational creature. As he saw, and as Machiavelli taught in a lesson his contemporary Castiglione extended to the figure of the courtier, the prince was a byproduct of the state he sought to rule. The state itself, moreover, was conceived as what, in the first part of his book, Burckhardt explicitly terms a “work of art”: something made by human hands that could as such always be challenged and changed as an expression of empirical events. The Renaissance individual was therefore from the outset an experiment of the sort I have set out to describe in these pages – the more so given the part both Machiavelli and Castiglione assigned to the at once princely and courtly work of self-fashioning in which all concerned engaged. Renaissance individuals were artworks as open to challenge and change as the state that gave them birth.

This pinpoints the deepest testimony of the likenesses that have preserved them. Take, for instance, Raphael’s portrait of Castiglione (c. 1514–15; [Figure 26](#)). It is easy, and inevitable, to begin by taking it at face value. As the logicians of Port-Royal would have it, the portrait “is” Castiglione just by virtue of presenting his likeness: everything in the picture is calculated to reinforce the response we are in any case predisposed to make the moment we recognize what kind of thing it is. Raphael achieves just that lucid objectivity of form Heinrich Wölfflin identified with what he called the “classical” art of the High Renaissance.<sup>23</sup> The figure is strongly modelled, form, light, and shadow combining to create a convincing impression of volume and weight in clearly articulated three-dimensional space. The face and hands are richly described in a full daylight that leaves nothing concealed or obscure, and the flesh tones convey the feel of living warmth. Above all the eyes meet ours in witness to the man’s conscious inhabitation of his own body and the world he shares with us.

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Figure 26. Raphael, *Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione* (c. 1514–15). Louvre, Paris.

Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

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The alert intelligence with which Raphael infuses the gaze induces us to confer on the person so portrayed a watchfulness that reflects our own. Our sense of being seen grants the image the faculty of sight, and through this in turn it acquires a self-determining existence it does not really have. The portrait takes on the character of a person because we are persuaded to react to it as one.

In the light of pictures like this it is then obvious why, reading Burckhardt's account of the Renaissance individual and the concomitant "discovery of man," art historians took up the study of portraits as a dominant theme; and they were clearly right to do so. By whatever means all of these portraits got there, there they are, demanding the kind of personalized recognition that is the spectatorly norm. As W.J.T. Mitchell would have it, this is what portraits want: you are not looking at one properly if you do not at some level credit it not simply with depicting but with being the person it portrays.<sup>24</sup> The form thus offers the means by which the subject projects his or her existence and identity into the present moment of the testimonial act the viewer is called on to perform. The experience of early modern portraits makes Burckhardt's point for him. Portraits not only give themselves in evidence of the emergent individual; they reenact its emergence, and, what is more, do so in person.

And yet, as the art-historical researches Burckhardt's thesis set in train reveal, the situation is not as simple as the direct experience of persons in their portraits suggests. Though Arnauld and Nicole explain why common usage entitles us to say that Raphael's portrait of Castiglione just is Castiglione, they remain perfectly aware that it is also only a portrait.<sup>25</sup> From the strictly logical point of view they adopt, analysis turns on the mediating notion of signs, and in particular names. Portraits and names share the same underlying function: that of bringing the referent to mind in the form of a clear and distinct idea. That the Jansenist logicians see no confusion or impropriety in giving a portrait the subject's name is due to the fact that both signs converge on the same idea. Portrait and idea represent the same person; and inasmuch as, logically considered, the person is what is at stake, the proper name is appropriate for all three, person, portrait, and idea at once. Similarly, when Piles praises Rembrandt for the surprising truth his portraits achieve, capturing both the flesh and the life, he testifies to the painter's mediating mastery of the goal his art has in view, namely, that of *being* true to flesh and life alike. To begin with there is the matter of the likeness: Raphael's portrait of Castiglione will not be Castiglione if it fails to look like him.

But likeness is a fact of art rather than nature, something the portrait accomplishes as an expression of the artist's skill independent of the actual subject it portrays. A question that may arise when contemplating Raphael's portrait of Castiglione is whether it genuinely looks like him or not. One way to check is

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to consult other portraits – say, the various engraved portraits readily available on the Internet, or the posthumous likeness painted by Antonio Maria Crespi sometime between 1613 and 1621, now in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana in Milan. The trouble with these portraits is of course that, as the briefest glance confirms, they are all based on the Raphael. We are thus forced to take the stem image on its face – a step all the easier to take in that it was specifically designed to be as convincing as we readily find it to be. It proffers not just an effigy of the sort engravings constitute as images of the author of the books in which they conventionally appear. It aspires, rather, to be the man's living image. However, this effect is achieved less by likeness than by life-likeness. It is the combined effect of colour, modelling, the saturated space in which the figure has been posed, the shadow of the head and torso on the wall at the back, and above all the intensely individuating impact of the expression of the face and the gaze that distills its character. What sets the painting apart, enabling Castiglione to stand out in the way Burckhardt imagines, is the remarkable sense of vulnerable intelligence discernible in his eyes. The sitter goes beyond merely returning our gaze; he warily watches us, thereby giving the experience of looking the tension of live, face-to-face encounter.

Person as it manifests itself as it were in person in a portrait is a function of the mediating work of art – and of work in both senses of the term, at once art's product and the process of producing it. The portrait constitutes the fidelity its status as a likeness claims for it. Not that the truth portraits aim for can dispense with likeness. Even in his famous 1910 Cubist portrait of the art dealer Paul Kahnweiler ([Figure 27](#)), Pablo Picasso puts in just enough observed detail (the sitter's moustache, for example) to show that it is indeed a portrait of that man. In an early modern context, where liberties of the sort Picasso takes were unthinkable, Castiglione would surely have been not only nonplussed but displeased by a picture that was not immediately recognizable as his own. Nevertheless, in the absence of the man himself or of a calibrating standard in a portrait by some other hand, the picture's life-likeness induces us to take its truth on faith. Life-likeness does the office of a likeness we cannot independently verify. We have to allow then for a whole series of mediations that the bare fact of the portrait does not bring to light.

We pick up a point here that Harry Berger makes in prefacing his analysis of portraits with a discussion of the evolving technologies of visual representation that made them possible.<sup>26</sup> Whatever the example of photographic likenesses may encourage the unwary to imagine, portraits do not spontaneously happen. Nor is it merely that, as we have just seen, artists have to make them. They have to choose to make them, and possess the skills, materials, and techniques required to do so.



Figure 27. Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Paul Kahnweiler* (1910). Art Institute of Chicago.  
Photo: Art Institute of Chicago/Art Resource, NY. © 2018, Estate of Pablo Picasso/  
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In the medieval West, before the turn observed in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, portraiture as we understand it was of no interest. Artists did often depict identifiable individuals. Take, for instance, the illumination in the *Grandes chroniques de France*, a fourteenth-century manuscript housed in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, picturing Charlemagne's coronation as Emperor of the Romans at the hands of Pope Leo III on Christmas Day in the year 800 (Figure 28). Both Charles and Leo are portrayed in that the artist has painted figures representing them as engaged in the historic event the illumination records. The figures are moreover indisputably lifelike and at least minimally individuated from each other and from the members of the papal court and imperial entourage gathered as witnesses. But quite apart from the fact that, at the historical distance at which the illuminator worked and in the absence of detailed literary descriptions of either of the men involved, the artist had no faithful portraits to draw on, the subjects of the picture were not persons as we have come to see them. Charles was, first and last, an *imperator*, and the Pope the Holy Father. Medievals certainly had strong opinions about whether Charles was a good *imperator* (he was), just as they had strong feelings about Leo, who in fact had many enemies from whom Charles protected him in exchange for his imperial crown. But key to the period notion of their individual identities was the role each played in the social order; and this is what the illuminator depicts. Charles is portrayed as an emperor seated at the pope's feet, and piously leaning in to him in an act of combined deference and command that defines less who they were than what they were and the relationship supposed to preside over the proceedings.<sup>27</sup>

There are then no portraits in the modern sense until there are persons in the modern sense even if one of the lessons we have already drawn is the circular bond they form. But this underlying circularity stresses a further point: we have neither persons nor portraits until we have the representational means needed to make the second convincing images of the first.

Early modern portraiture depends on the evolution of early modern art in general, and in particular the naturalism by which early modern art distinguished itself from the traditions it transformed. Take Hans Memling's *Portrait of a Man Holding a Coin of the Emperor Nero* (c. 1480; Figure 29). The basic format of the head and upper torso set against a background view of the natural world was a standard one. We see an especially breathtaking example in Piero della Francesca's famous double portrait of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino, Federigo da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza, composed sometime around 1480, where the married pair are presented in medal-like profile, she looking from left to right and he, facing her, from right to left, against a broad and deep sunlit landscape. One of the things that distinguishes the Memling is the likelihood



Figure 28. Manuscript illumination of the Coronation of Charlemagne by Pope Leo III, from *Les grandes chroniques de France* (late 14th century), Bodleian Library, ms. Douce 217, fol. 077v. Photo: courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

that it portrays a numismatist, identified as such by the coin he holds in his hand. Memling may thus have preserved the likeness of a scholar presenting a token of the ancient past in full consciousness of its documentary value for the humanist discipline of history. The important thing for our present purpose, however, is the fact of the background landscape itself.

Supposing that it does not frankly proclaim the union between painting and landscape, the picture illustrates how exact portraiture goes hand in hand with the artist's capacity to represent the world at large. Much of the pleasure involved in looking at Memling's portrait derives from the fascination exerted by "atmospheric" perspective: the way the painter generates a powerful sense of spatial recession simply by making the dark blue at the top of the sky fade towards white as we approach the horizon. Further pleasure springs from the circumstantial detail provided both in the landscape itself, with its lake, trees, and undulating meadows leading out to a prospect of distant hills, and in the *staffage* figures that animate it – the swans quietly paddling in the lake while a horseman trots his mount on the far shore. It is not simply that Memling demonstrates his mastery of two different aspects of his art; each is the rigorous





Figure 29. Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Man Holding a Coin of the Emperor Nero* (c. 1480). Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Brussels. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

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condition and correlate of the other. As pursued in the medium of painting, the Piconian discovery of humankind explores the natural environment of which human beings are the increasingly self-conscious exponents.

Raphael's portrait of Castiglione teaches the same lesson despite the absence of an opening on the outside world. The vivid sense of being in the man's direct physical and emotional presence embodies the work of visualization the painter performs. There is the artist's management of the three-dimensional space in which the figure sits and his use of light and shadow as a means of modelling both figure and space as coordinates of a continuous whole. The volumetric solidity Raphael gives the sitter derives from his locatedness in relation to the light source off to the left, the wall in the back on which his shadow is cast, and the beholder whose gaze he meets from the positions at which the painter places each. Further, the luminarist techniques Memling uses to create an effect of deep ambient space, the mirror-like shimmer of lake water, or the bushy luxuriance of leaves capture the rich if discreet materiality of Castiglione's dress, and especially the colour and expressiveness of his face and eyes. We noticed a moment ago that Raphael's Castiglione watches us. This is the combined effect of the unwavering directness of his gaze, the way the head angles gently away to its left, causing the gaze to turn back towards ours in the effort to catch our eye, and the alert yet faintly melancholy calm that suffuses the face. The figure is wonderfully at rest if not quite serene. The posture is at once erect and relaxed, and the light that falls over the sitter picks out the gently folded hands in his lap. The figure radiates reserves of energy and intent, poised to stand up or speak at any moment, yet sits back in anticipation of whatever may eventuate from the wary intimacy of exchanged glances.

All of which underscores the use of colour and the means required to exploit it: Raphael's mastery of the oil paint that is as a matter of fact the only thing really there. The replacement of egg-based tempera with oil-based pigments was the revolutionary invention of fifteenth-century Netherlandish art.<sup>28</sup> As displayed notably in Jan van Eyck's *Wedding Portrait of the Arnolfini* of 1434 (Figure 30), the careful accretion of thin layers of semi-translucent paint prompted a startling leap forward in the description of both light and the material stuff on and through which it plays. Window glass, the quicksilver surface of a mirror, the brass and crystal of a chandelier, the sumptuous thickness of velvet and fur, the sheen of satin or the grain of wood – all became themes of minute and vigorous analysis. Colour itself moreover obtained a new vibrancy and warmth, together with a far wider range of variations of intensity and tone.

What all of this brought to portraiture in particular was not only a new realism but a new subtlety in the treatment of face and expression. Properly coloured, flesh comes alive but also becomes more densely textured. In the portrait

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Figure 30. Jan van Eyck, *Wedding Portrait of the Arnolfini* (1434). National Gallery, London. Photo: © National Gallery, London/Art Resource, NY.

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of Castiglione, Raphael renders the diagonal indentation in the sitter's brow, the shallow arcs of pursed skin below the eyes, the delicate furrows at the bridge of the nose, and the deeper ones linking nose and mouth. He finds the means to express the downy softness of Castiglione's moustache, the forked tangle of his beard, and the curious dimple in the middle of his upper lip. Above all he captures the effect of light on Castiglione's eyes, light retransmitted by the gaze through the highlights playing on the dove-grey irises, the dark pits of the pupils, and the rounded aqueous gleam of the whites. Early moderns set about observing and portraying individual persons because persons had come to matter as apprehended in their individuality. Yet the individuality that portraits conferred on their subjects is the product of the formal, technical, and, as illustrated by the role that oil paint played, material properties of the art that enabled them to do so.

All of these things explain the peculiar pickle in which art historians find themselves when describing the portraits they like.<sup>29</sup> On the one hand, following Piles, they talk about truth. A good portrait is no mere faithful likeness; it is "true" to its subject, revealing something important about who the sitter is or was. On the other hand, it is also a characteristic expression of the artist who made it. Rembrandt's portrait of the lawyer and art collector Jan Six (1654; see [chapter 2, Figure 12](#)) is not just an image of the man executed with every semblance of exact fidelity; it is also a "Rembrandt." It has indeed all of the signature features of what Svetlana Alpers has called the Rembrandt "look."<sup>30</sup> The thing about a Rembrandt is that it looks like one, readily identifiable as the kind of thing Rembrandt would have painted. In the case of the portrait of Six, we find just the sort of "truth to the flesh and the life" Piles admired: the remarkable candour, for instance, brought to rendering the puffy folds and blotches of the skin, tokens of the wear and tear of incipient middle age that the painter registers with relish as well as precision. But we also get the signature inwardness Rembrandt gave almost all of the subjects of his portraits. As depicted here, Six is strikingly absent from the scene. His mind is elsewhere, engaged in thoughts, feelings, or memories the sole warrant for whose existence is the inner-directedness of the gaze. This is doubtless a major source of the truth Piles saw. The eyes become the proverbial "window on the soul" that complements the naturalistic frankness of the description by suggesting that this is somehow not a portrait at all but just the man himself, caught unawares in a moment of deep introspection. But to what exactly is the portrait true here: Six, or the family of inward-looking creatures to which Rembrandt habitually reduced his sitters?<sup>31</sup>

And yet the painting remains a portrait, defined as such not only by the notion of truth the bottom-line demand for likeness imposes but also by the subject's desire to have his portrait made. For the sitter too plays a part in shaping

the portrait. Berger puts the matter unusually well.<sup>32</sup> A portraitist works not just from the subject but from the pose the subject strikes. In this sense, the true object of Raphael's *Castiglione* or Rembrandt's *Jan Six* is less the man than how the man chooses to present himself. To borrow a phrase from Michael Baxandall's *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, artworks are the deposit of a social relationship. This is especially obvious in a society like that of early modern Europe, where artists worked under a system of patronage and commissions in which the impetus for the paintings or sculptures they made originated in demand. As Baxandall documents, everything from the subject to be represented to the iconographic program to be followed, and from the contribution to be made by the lead artist as opposed to collaborators or studio assistants down to the quality and cost of the stone or paint to be used, was subject to often heated contractual negotiation. Artists simply did not enjoy the unfettered freedom and control that accompanied not only the Romantic ideology of the lone creative genius but also the creation of a professional art market capable of providing outlets for works conceived on the artist's personal initiative.<sup>33</sup>

What was true of art in general was all the more emphatically so where portraits were concerned, and most immediately in the case of portraits of the high and mighty. The statue of Molière's murdered commander is a good example. In keeping with the self-betraying pomposity Don Juan ridicules, the commander's family has had him portrayed in the dress of a Roman emperor in witness of the grandeur the dead man liked to imagine he possessed. Diego Velázquez's struggles with the notorious lantern jaw of the Hapsburgs is another case in point in that the need for likeness had to be balanced against the need to avoid the embarrassment an excess of Rembrandtesque candour might have caused.<sup>34</sup> Or take Hyacinthe Rigaud's portrait of 1701, depicting the aging Louis XIV attired for the *sacre* or public rite of kingship (Figure 31). Quite apart from the decorum that had to be observed, there was the social and political function the image was intended to perform: that of communicating the sovereign's majesty and right even as he entered an old age whose symptoms Rigaud softened without however erasing them. Much has been made in this connection of the part played by the monarch's front leg.<sup>35</sup> Carefully sheathed in white silk to hide unsightly flabbiness or varicose veins, the leg serves as a synecdoche for the rest of the body, hinting at the virile athleticism and grace thanks to which the sovereign as Rigaud depicts him resists the onslaught of time. Rigaud's task was thus to convey these things with all the loyalty as well as fidelity circumstances allowed.

Needless to say, Raphael's relationship with Castiglione and Rembrandt's with Six were very different from Velázquez's with Felipe IV or Rigaud's with Louis XIV. For one thing, Castiglione and Six were friends as well as allies and





Figure 31. Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Portrait of Louis XIV en Sacre du Roi* (1701).

Louvre, Paris. Photo: Gérard Biot. © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.

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patrons: negotiating the terms for their portraits would thus have been more conversational than contractual. For another, particularly in Rembrandt's case given how idiosyncratic the look of his portraits was, sitters presumably knew what they were letting themselves in for when they commissioned painters like these to portray them. Still, things are never as simple as they seem. Friendship might have functioned as a regulator of sorts even with an artist as headstrong as Rembrandt. After all, no one deliberately sets out to offend a friend, especially when some kind of payment and one's public reputation as an artist are on the line. To this extent, sitters who are at one level subservient to the artist reassert their rights. For they have a stake in the outcome, determined not just by private taste but by the sense of social distinction portraits bring.

It is a truism that you need to "be somebody" to have your portrait taken. Portraiture implies a public profile, or at any rate the funds required to claim one. To be sure, a person becomes somebody the moment a portrait is made. But that can only happen on the strength of the form's underlying character and intention. This fact explains both the distinction between portraits and portrait-like objects like the character sketches or expressive heads the Dutch call *tronies* and ambiguous cases where it proves hard to tell the difference between them. Jan Vermeer's *Young Woman with a Pearl Earring*, discussed in [chapter 2](#), offers a rich example. Though the artist clearly used a model, the painting is just as clearly an expressive head rather than a portrait – whence indeed the alternate title frequently given this picture, featuring the head as well as the earring. But it is interesting to ask how the distinction is drawn. The answer lies in the remarkable unguardedness of the woman's expression: the sense in which the face has been taken unawares, in an instant in which the subject has had no time to compose herself – to strike indeed a pose.

Or consider Frans Hals's *Gypsy Girl* of 1628 (see [chapter 1](#), [Figure 2](#)). Here we have a character sketch, but how do we know it? The subject's social class, indexed by her attire and uncoiffed hair, has a lot to do with it. So does the way she avoids our eye. Her expression is at once mischievous and shy, evincing awareness of exposure to public attention and a certain social discomfort even if she manifestly enjoys the experience just the same. Or take a Rembrandt drawing from 1630, called *Self-Portrait with a Cap, Wide-Eyed and Open-Mouthed* ([Figure 32](#)). The picture is normally classed among the 75 self-portraits the artist is known to have composed over the course of his career for the simple reason that the face he has used is manifestly his own. However, this classification is misleading if not flatly false. The drawing's point is not the identity of the sitter; it is the expression he puts on. It is a study of the look of astonishment, shock, or horror with which a bystander might watch an impending accident or stabbing. Rembrandt being Rembrandt, he may also be engaged in mocking





Figure 32. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait in a Cap, Wide-Eyed and Open-Mouthed* (1630). Morgan Library. Photo: courtesy of the Morgan Library and Museum.

the conventions of expression as deployed in formal narrative paintings of significant events in the Bible, ancient history, or classical myth.<sup>36</sup> The fact remains that the image is not about Rembrandt himself. He has merely used his own face for the experimental purpose of trying out expressions.

And yet the Vermeer and the Hals in particular do leave us wondering. This is partly a matter of format. Regular portraits often have this general look, especially dating from the “age of sensibility” in the later eighteenth century as illustrated by Jean-Baptiste Greuze’s *The White Hat* of c. 1780 (Figure 33) or Marie-Louise-Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun’s *Marie Antoinette in a Muslin Dress* of 1783 (Figure 34). Though it is not clear that the first of these is in fact a portrait – it all depends on how you react to the exposed breast<sup>37</sup> – there is, from a strictly formal point of view, nothing to choose between the two pictures since both aim for the spontaneous candour of unstudied intimacy we also detect



Figure 33. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *The White Hat* (c. 1780). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photo: © 2018, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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Figure 34. Marie-Louise-Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun, *Marie-Antoinette in Muslin Dress* (1783). Hessische Hausstiftung, Kronberg, Germany.

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in Vermeer's *Pearl Earring* and Hals's *Gypsy Girl*. However, the main reason we are left wondering how to place the Hals and Vermeer is their focus on an individual face explored in at once direct and minute detail. A model or not, a gypsy girl or not, the fact that Hals and Vermeer have portrayed them even if for some other purpose makes them persons. The beholder is accordingly led, and perhaps even obliged, to respond to them in just the way he or she would to the sitter for a portrait proper.

Still, as Emily Dickinson remarks, how dreary to be somebody, and where not dreary, how fraught. As Hals's gypsy girl reminds us by avoiding our eye, to become the subject of a portrait is to fall subject to public notice. The person as represented in a portrait is not just an empirical likeness that the artist more or less faithfully takes down. Nor is it just the pose by which the sitter chooses to present him or herself to the world. It is an object of public scrutiny that neither the sitter nor the artist can wholly predict or control. This highlights the deepest drive to which sitters bear witness: the desire to pre-empt the acts of looking and interpretation to which their emergence in the form of a portrait exposes them. However much, in the post-Burckhardtian spirit of mainstream assessments of early modern portraits, we may stress the individuality and autonomy of the persons they have preserved for us, there are no individuals, no persons, who are not an expression of their relation to all of those other persons with whom they share the corner of the world in which they live. The portrait is the exemplar of a deeper and more pervasive drama: the experience of self as being an inescapably social as well as intimately private affair.

We see this, for example, in the emulative and so mimetic character of poses. As Berger notices, like Richard Brilliant before him, the desire to present one's identity in the public world presupposes attention to models.<sup>38</sup> As Jean de La Rochefoucauld observes in the one hundred thirty-sixth of his *Maximes* (1678), "There are people who would never have fallen in love if they had never heard other people talk about it."<sup>39</sup> We meet something exactly similar in the case of portraits: the desire to have one's portrait made is mediated by the existence of precursors. It is indeed the desire to have a portrait that looks like *that* one. Artists of genius – Raphael, Titian, Rembrandt – may succeed in nudging the form in new directions, but models always get there first. The extant body of portraits is thus the school in which sitters and painters alike learn what portraits are. In the process, they also learn what person is: as Jacques Lacan poignantly puts it, the "armour" of the "alienating identity" by which we simultaneously project and defend whatever it is we feel we really are, or at least want to.<sup>40</sup>

The watchfulness we have discovered in Raphael's Castiglione proves paradigmatic. Castiglione was many things: a diplomat and poet as well as author

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of *The Book of the Courtier*; a friend as well as a subject of Raphael, to whom he addressed a verse encomium to the greater glory of sitter and painter alike; and a Lombard in a cultural order that favoured Tuscan, prompting a discussion of the form the Italian language ought to take in the mouth of the ideal courtier his book sets out to describe.<sup>41</sup> Above all, though, he was a public personality destined to act on a public stage in the presence of others like himself. Having his portrait made was a public act, at once a presentation and expression of not only who he intended to be taken for but who he believed he was. But who he “was” was as much a matter of who he came to be taken for as of whatever his true inner character may have been. The performance of one’s identity registered in a pose is a complex transaction one of whose terms is what the experience of portraits taught that successful pictorial personae looked like even as it also warned of the social risks posers undergo.

Portraits, in short, were both expressions of and templates for the persons they portrayed: forms of often highly theatricalized self-presentation in which people tried to become the kinds of person the experience of other people’s portraits modelled for them. In the process, the experiment of self-presentation reenacted the existential vicissitudes to which civic life subjected them. For, a form of life in the public eye, portraiture unfolded under the keenly observant gazes of others, many of them rivals and enemies as well as allies or friends. It is entirely appropriate, then, that the subject of one of the era’s most memorable portraits should also have written its greatest conduct manual: a dialogue about the ruling ideal shaping a major type of early modern personality – the courtier.

We learn a great deal in Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier* about the many fields in which the ideal representative of the tribe was expected to excel. He is for a start a male, the gender to which three of the dialogue’s four parts are devoted. He must master all of the both polite and martial skills: riding, fencing, and acrobatics; drawing, dancing, and singing; book learning and public speaking; the arts of making friends, flirting with ladies, and holding one’s end up in witty conversation without hurting other people’s feelings or transgressing the proprieties of time, place, and company. He must also be of sterling moral character: honest and true without being wounding; respectful of others without being servile; courageous without being boastful or rash; prudent while avoiding undue paranoia or suspicion; proud but not arrogant; mindful of his honour without being prickly or quarrelsome; generous yet careful to live within his means; well-dressed but not ostentatiously so; temperate while nonetheless enjoying all the good things in life; and capable of sympathizing with the sufferings of others without being unmanned by emotion. The trouble is however that all concerned take it for granted that the courtier’s chief goal is to stand out both among and above the rest, distinguished from his peers by

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his peculiar excellence. He is then from the outset in competition with those among whom he has chosen to live, and among whom in fact he must live if the aim is to succeed at court, earning the admiring affection of his peers as well as his prince. The task before him is to shine without alienating anyone, failing which he will sooner or later meet with the disgrace (and loss of face) that is the courtier's abiding fear.

Castiglione's answer is to introduce a new term into the discourse of art as well as conduct, *sprezzatura*: the air of grace and artless spontaneity, of what the French will slightly later call *le naturel*, supposed to attend even the courtier's most calculated words and deeds (65–70; 45–51). The cultivation of *sprezzatura* is meant in the first instance to spare the courtier the worst of social solecisms, affectation. Affectation is of course both unseemly and ridiculous. But, to make a point we will return to shortly, it is also transparent, and blind to its transparency. The only person who fails to perceive the malady is the sufferer, ranking it with cuckoldry as a condition whose power to mortify derives from the victim's unawareness of a source of ridicule that is common knowledge to everyone else. Affectation is accordingly often a source of amusement to observers. In searching for a game to occupy their evening, Castiglione's company initially reminisces about the pleasure taken on earlier occasions in exciting some fool to reveal his folly unawares, to the great joy of all those gathered to watch (46–7; 24–5).

Needless to say, none of those present on the evening in question could ever be suspected of this particular vice: the dialogue's premise is that the participants represent everything that is most accomplished in members of a princely court. Nevertheless, the attention devoted to the discussion of *sprezzatura*, combined with some of the more crudely self-betraying outbursts of misogyny later in the proceedings, evince uneasy awareness that even they are not immune to an evil endemic to public life. The problem is that the demand for the graceful *naturel* the speakers extol is directly proportional to the fact that there is nothing remotely natural about courtly conduct. Like the portraits that model features of expression, posture, gesture, hygiene, and dress requisite to courtly success, the courtier is a work of art: the creature of a thoroughly artificial mode of existence all the more potentially unendurable for having to conceal its true character.

It is a commonplace of Castiglione studies, as of studies of conduct manuals generally, that the ideal of courtly deportment is riven by the constitutive tension between art and nature.<sup>42</sup> As discussion begins in Castiglione's Urbino, it is taken for granted that the best way to become a true courtier is just to be one as a matter of inner temperament and birth. If one lacks the basic ingredients that only nature bestows, no amount of training or self-discipline will help. Yet



uncultivated nature will not suffice either, especially when, as discussants note at the very start, what we value under the names of inner character and birth are social as well as natural criteria. As the first speaker, Lodovico Canossa, argues to universal assent, the ideal courtier must have a sound moral makeup, be of average height, be unblemished by physical defects – and be nobly born (54–7; 32–6). The conversants quibble about this last item, allowing that the accomplishments of exceptional individuals have been known to compensate for humble birth. One need only think of the example set by *condottieri* or successful merchant bankers like Jacob Fugger, the Bardi, or Lorenzo il Magnifico de' Medici to see why. The fact remains that all concerned acknowledge that humble origins are an impediment to social success since, in the end, it is for courtiers to decide who makes the grade, and rank at birth is a factor they are unlikely to overlook.

Berger pushes this reading further, observing that the grace associated with *sprezzatura* is itself in many respects a gift of nature. More pointedly still, it is the heaven-sent gift of *divine* grace. Like the redemptive faith at the heart of the Lutheran doctrine of justification that was so keenly debated precisely in the decades during which Castiglione composed his text, God's grace cannot be acquired through our own self-determined efforts.<sup>43</sup> Art is in this sense not only a potential enemy as well as aid to nature; it is its antithesis. Whence, precisely, the core value attached to *sprezzatura* as a form of work mastery of which demands the fiction of unrehearsed spontaneity. Lodovico draws the moral by telling the story of catching a glimpse of a pretty young lady's leg in the street:

Surely [...] you have sometimes noticed when a woman, passing along the street perhaps to church, happens, in play or for some other reason, to raise just enough of her skirts to reveal a foot and often a little of her leg as well. Does it not strike you as a truly graceful sight if she is seen just at that moment, delightfully feminine, showing her velvet ribbon and pretty stockings? Certainly I find it very agreeable, as I'm sure you all do, because everyone assumes that elegance in a place where it is generally hidden from view must be uncontrived and natural rather than carefully calculated, and that it cannot be intended to win admiration. (87; 70–1)

Courtiers are themselves flirts by profession. Who better then to appreciate the little fan dance Lodovico himself performs in pretending that the young lady's performance has taken him in as being as uncontrived, and therefore as “graceful” and “delightfully feminine,” as he professes to believe?

All of which is to say that, as Berger intimates in the title of the book he devoted to conduct manuals, for all the talk of grace, the existential condition of

the world in which Castiglione's dialogue takes place is defined by the *absence* of grace in a strict theological sense.<sup>44</sup> Like the flirtatious lady in the street who may (or may not) be on her way to church, and like the well-dressed gentleman for whom she performs her little exhibition, courtiers inhabit the postlapsarian world of original sin that created the human species as we know it. And indeed, if the attainments of the ideal courtier are not only worth discussing but needful, a point to which the participants constantly revert in urging the speakers who address the theme to keep talking,<sup>45</sup> it is because the gracine gift of true courtiership is in distressingly short supply.

Castiglione lays the difficulty out in the book's preamble, where he explains how the dialogue came to be written. *The Book of the Courtier* presents itself as a eulogy to paradise lost, a shining moment in Italian history that will never come again. As the narrator reports in the preamble, by the time the book reached print a number of the participants were dead, some under tragic circumstances (32; 6–7). Ottaviano Fregoso for instance, who takes the lead on the fourth and final night when discussion turns to the moral and political as well as social ends the ideal courtier should pursue, would spend the bulk of his career struggling to seize control of his native Genoa, only to die in exile after being taken prisoner during the Imperial sack of the city in 1522. Giuliano de' Medici, son of the great Lorenzo and defender of the ladies on the dialogue's third night, led a feckless and dissolute life that would leave him dead at the age of 37. And Francesco Maria della Rovere, though destined to inherit the duchy of Urbino following its current ruler's death, would be driven from the city for a time in 1516, would murder a cardinal for an act of treachery actually committed by his own younger brother, and would play a grossly incompetent role in the defence of Rome, sacked by Imperial forces in 1525.

The narrator returns to the theme in the lead-in to the fourth and final conversation, where he notes that "not long after these discussions took place, untimely death deprived our household of three of its finest gentlemen, while they were still in the prime of life and hopeful of honour" – the three gentlemen in question being Gaspare Palavicino, Cesare Gonzaga, and Roberto da Bari, all carried off in witness to the way in which "Fortune frustrates our weak and feeble plans, sometimes wrecking them even before we sight harbour" (281; 287). Moreover, at the time the dialogue is supposed to have taken place, the court of Urbino itself bore the scars of both personal and political mischance. If the dialogue occurs at all, it is because the reigning duke, a failed *condottiere* who would manage to get expelled from the city on two occasions, is an invalid forced by illness to take himself early to bed. Deprived of the honour of attending on their lord, the courtiers are left with time on their hands; and it is while seeking a suitable occupation that they hit on the theme of the book.<sup>46</sup>

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Beyond illustrating the noble spirit, high intelligence, and scintillating wit that, despite everything, Castiglione claims to have distinguished the court of his youth, the dialogue speaks to a natural need that only art can fill. This is all the more obviously true in that, as the participants themselves repeatedly insist, echoing a lesson the preamble draws, the ideal they work out together is just that: an ideal that, as such, no single, flesh-and-blood person could ever hope to embody.<sup>47</sup>

The dialogue ends at dawn when, having completed the last of the four conversations devoted to the topic, the courtiers discover they have talked the night away. The theme that has so deeply engrossed them is the identity of the ideal prince it is the ideal courtier's mission to help create. The discussion not only circles back to the myth of Plato's Republic already invoked in the preamble (35–6; 12), put here in the equivocal mouth of Ottaviano Fregoso, whose failure to govern his native city was a matter of public record (315/328, and 317/330 for a sly hint at Ottaviano's political ineptitude). It inspires the poet Pietro Bembo's even more enthusiastically neo-Platonic vision of the cosmic order of which prince and courtier are meant to be defenders and exemplars:

Consider the structure of this great fabric of the universe, which was created by God for the health and preservation of all His creatures. The bowl of heaven, adorned with so many celestial lamps, and the earth in the centre, surrounded by the elements and sustained by its own weight; the sun, illuminating all things as it revolves, in winter approaching the lowest sign, and then by degrees ascending to the other side; the moon, which derives its light from the sun, in accord with whether the sun is approaching or drawing away; and the five other stars which separately travel the same course: these all influence each other so profoundly through the coherence of the natural order that if they changed in the slightest they could no longer exist together and the universe would crumble. Moreover, they have such beauty and loveliness that the human mind cannot conceive anything more graceful. Consider next the structure of man, who may be called a little universe in himself. We see that every part of his body is in the natural order of things made by design and not by chance and that his form as a whole is so beautiful that it is difficult to decide whether it is utility or grace that is given more to the human face and body by its various parts, such as the eyes, nose, mouth, ears, arms and breast. (331; 344–5)

We return yet again to Pico's *Oration* of 1486, and to the catastrophe on the point of overtaking it even as it was pronounced – a catastrophe to which, like the Machiavelli of *The Prince* and like Francesco Guicciardini, whose furiously indignant account of Italian history from 1490 to 1534 began appearing

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posthumously in 1561, Castiglione was an eyewitness. If there was anything the author of *The Book of the Courtier* knew, it was how empty the dialogue's promise of dawn turned out to be.

All of which is reflected in Raphael's portrait. This is so not only because our response to the likeness is inevitably coloured by our knowledge of the man it portrays, of the fact that he is the author of *The Book of the Courtier* and an eyewitness to the historical crisis in whose sinister shadow the dialogue was both written and read. It is also because our knowledge of these things deepens our grasp of the existential performance it depicts, the work of self-fashioning whose central index is the watchfulness with which the man both holds and returns our gaze.

If the hallmark of the self that Raphael and Castiglione collaborate in presenting is just this watchfulness, it is because the face sets a boundary to what it reveals. This fusion of contrary motions, at once drawing us in and pushing us out, characterizes many early modern portraits. In Rembrandt's *Jan Six*, we meet what became the common expedient of an averted gaze, suggesting the poser's absorption in private thoughts. In Rigaud's *Louis XIV en Sacre du Roi*, we observe the intimidating majesty with which the Sun King outstares us, putting us in our place as subjects of his sovereign authority. It is rare, though, to encounter an example like Raphael's *Castiglione*, where the sitter's modest approachability is countered by an ambiguous exchange of glances that would normally engage us. The reason is that this particular portrait invites us to reflect on a property it shares with others. Early modern portraiture stages a complex interplay of inside and outside, of public visibility and an interior withheld from unmediated inspection. This too is part of what Piles calls truth and life: the sense that there is more than appears, or ever could appear, in the image before us.

One expression of the hide-and-seek quality of early modern portraits is period awareness of what Berger terms the "physiognomic fallacy."<sup>48</sup> People – art historians as much as lay folk – like to say that, thanks to painters of genius like Raphael or Rembrandt, all we need do is look to see who this person really is. Even as sharp-eyed a critic as the great historical semiologist Louis Marin goes wrong here, albeit with an irony of which his historical sources were incapable, in wholeheartedly endorsing Arnauld and Nicole's claim that the "portrait of Caesar is Caesar."<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, one of the things we learn about faces, a fact of experience verified by the uses to which we regularly put our own, is that they are not necessarily what they seem. This item of common experience had moreover a widely acknowledged pertinence in the world Castiglione describes, the world of politics and the court. If physiognomy was the focus of almost obsessive theoretical as well as practical attention, it is precisely because courtiers

(like lovers) had an urgent need to learn how to read even the most subtle shifts of expression in the faces not only of the princes they sought to please but of competitors for princely blessings. Which means that all concerned, including princes themselves, had an intense interest in both concealing their true thoughts and feelings and in counterfeiting those that decorum, circumstance, or stratagem demanded. A dominant theme of conduct literature, as of period literature generally, was thus dissimulation: the dark art of secrets, misdirection, and disguise one of whose most memorable practitioners was Lorenzo il Magnifico de' Medici, subject of a posthumous portrait by Giorgio Vasari (1534) now in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence (Figure 35).<sup>50</sup>

It is worth stressing how strange this portrait is. The depiction of il Magnifico reappears later in another, much larger picture that Vasari was commissioned to paint by Lorenzo's descendant Cosimo I to adorn his public apartments in the Palazzo Vecchio (Figure 36). The larger picture's theme is Lorenzo receiving gifts from his ambassadors, a polite way of describing the tribute paid by vassal states. Taken together with the identity of the commissioner and the location for which it was conceived, it commemorates Cosimo's legendary ancestor in the spirit of unalloyed praise. The note of praise carries over into the smaller picture reserved for Cosimo's private study. Portrayed as a handsome, fiercely energetic, and deeply intelligent man whose presentation in near profile conceals the broken nose visible in frontal views (Figure 37), Lorenzo is posed against a tomblike structure piled high with works of fine and domestic art – choice samples from the profusion of gifts depicted in the big *portrait d'apparat* that were also probably meant to denote the art patronage for which he was celebrated.

Lorenzo's status as a patron as well as conqueror yields an interpretation of the downward path of a gaze that, in the larger painting, greets the ambassadors come to pay homage. In its original, claustrophobically private setting, the gaze's direction intimates deep thought: the man's quick and fertile brain teems with powerful and (presumably) noble ideas known only to himself. This reading is supported by one of the two fully legible inscriptions the portrait contains. On the tall ewer to the right, standing over the mask (or severed head?) of a satyr, we read VIRTUTVM OMNIVM VAS, "vessel of all virtues." Lorenzo is thus remembered as the possessor of the moral as well as political virtues a ruler must command to earn the fame he enjoys even in death. The portrait propounds a private lesson Cosimo should apply as he sets out on his own princely career.

But this is just where the portrait's strangeness kicks in. We have already noted the composition's claustrophobic atmosphere, deepened by the brooding gloom produced by the shadows massed in the upper left corner and by the way the avoidance of strong chiaroscuro contrasts mutes the overall light



Figure 35. Giorgio Vasari, *Portrait of Lorenzo de' Medici* (1534).

Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

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Figure 36. Giorgio Vasari, *Lorenzo de' Medici Receiving His Ambassadors* (1556–8).

Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. Photo: Nicolo Orsi Battaglini/Art Resource, NY.

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Figure 37. Andrea del Verrocchio, *Portrait Bust of Lorenzo de' Medici* (1478). National Gallery, Washington, DC. Photo: courtesy of the National Gallery.

effect. The mask (or head) of the satyr and the yawning maw of a demon down whose throat a stiletto seems to have been thrust add to the sense of threat and disquiet. Nor should we overlook the red leather coin purse hanging from Lorenzo's belt, where a comically rapacious imp ogles it through an opening in the tomb's wall.

All of these darker messages point to the second inscription, engraved directly into the tomb itself, below the satyr's head: VITIA VIRT/VTI SVBIA/CENT. Note first how the ewer's genitive plural (*virtvtvm*) gives way to the dative singular (*virtvti*) of the tomb. The emphasis accordingly shifts from all of the virtues, including moral ones, encoded in the Latin *virtus* to what period Italian called *virtù*: the essentially amoral force or prowess needed to get things done, whatever the moral character of the ends and means involved. This is the kind of "virtue" Machiavelli granted Cesare Borgia, the unscrupulous adventurer whose career *The Prince* analyses as an example of Italian politics at its

most viciously effective.<sup>51</sup> This is moreover the “virtue” Lorenzo himself displayed, most notably in the murderous retribution visited on the rival Pazzi family in the wake of their failed attempt to assassinate him during High Mass in the Duomo – an act of tribal revenge that coincidentally put an end to all challenge to Medici supremacy.<sup>52</sup>

The replacement of *virtus* by *virtù* enables us to gloss the second inscription’s deep ambiguity. Read one way, *vitia virtuti subiacent* suggests that the crimes or vices *vitia* denotes lie under virtue in the sense of being subject to or subdued by it. However, the verb *subiaceo* can also mean to lie close to, belong to, accompany, or subtend. The inscription can then be seen as transmitting one of the darker *arcana imperii*, fit only for a prince’s private ear: the doctrine of “reason of state” promulgated in Giovanni Botero’s *Della ragion di stato* of 1589. In arguing how there are times in the life of any state when the prince must perform actions that would be crimes in ordinary life, Botero takes pains to distinguish his doctrine from Machiavelli’s hellish teachings. Nonetheless, the fact that, in 1621, Botero’s follower Ludovico Zuccolo opens his own book on the subject by claiming to have borrowed the term reason of state from the common people, complaining that even barbers and street vendors use it to pass judgment on matters of state, indicates how deeply the idea had taken root in Italian political culture.<sup>53</sup> It was then taken for granted that vice and crime accompany political virtue owing to the very nature of political affairs, especially once we acknowledge, as Vasari’s second inscription invites us to, how equivocal what passes for public virtue often turns out to be.

Which brings us to the most striking, and sinister, feature of the portrait: the mask placed just behind Lorenzo’s head, as though whispering words of private counsel in his ear. Evoking in its eyeless blankness both a death’s head and a death mask, the mask hints at the contents of il Magnifico’s brain. Lorenzo is not simply thinking; he is thinking about politics – about the art of government conceived as devising the means required to achieve whatever ends policy sets. And the key to the art is none other than the mask from whose lips Lorenzo takes secret advice. There is a tag attributed to the fifteenth-century French king Louis XI, a monarch known as “the Spider” in ambivalent tribute to his unique deviousness: *qui nescit dissimulare, nescit regnare*, “who knows not how to dissimulate knows not how to rule.”<sup>54</sup> Vasari’s portrait of Lorenzo, the private version withheld from public scrutiny, is thus that of the prince as dissimulator, the man who keeps his secrets even from family and friends.

In court life then, as Castiglione knew it, and as it was still known a century later in the world inhabited by the great French theorists of *honnêteté* from Nicolas Faret to La Rochefoucauld and the chevalier de Méré, dissimulation and the related sin of hypocrisy constituted a behavioural if not moral norm,

a fact of experience that had to be reckoned with as a matter of social survival. The potential for dissimulation was as real in the case of portraits as in any other form of public self-presentation. The sense of an unfathomable limit that we meet in Raphael's portrait of Castiglione despite the quiet candour that strikes us at first glance is a deliberately pointed display of a feature endemic to person at large. It may well be that, as Berger argues, the sense of a hidden interior, of a face as it were behind the face, is an effect rather than a cause of the performances that make us think so.<sup>55</sup> Yet it remains a vivid item of experience just the same, on both sides of the transaction. For, once again, person is a relational phenomenon, something that happens to us as an expression of social cohabitation.

We can bring this point out more clearly by returning to the generic contrast between portraits and *tronies*, expressive heads and related character sketches like Vermeer's *Young Woman with a Pearl Earring* and especially Hals's *Gypsy Girl*. As we noted earlier, we know that the latter is not a portrait because of her averted gaze, unkempt hair, and lowly social standing. Hals presents the girl who posed for him as enjoying the painter's attention. But she also subtly resists it, confirming in the process that she is the slave of the artist's scrutiny in a way that the self-fashioning sitters of his portraits are not. However, a feature of Hals's portraits, giving them much of their animation and charm, is the way he seems to get around his subjects at times, disclosing elements of character we imagine they would have preferred to keep private, assuming they were aware of them at all. The result is that, in Hals's work in particular, it is often tricky to know where to draw the line between likenesses and *tronies*.

Take, for example, one of his most celebrated portraits, of an otherwise unknown man called the Laughing Cavalier (1624; [Figure 38](#)). Let me begin by pointing out that I am not at all sure the cavalier is actually laughing. The upward curves at the ends of his comically dashing moustache suggest a certain mirth, but the mouth is closed and unsmiling. He certainly looks pleased with himself but, peered at closely, the general expression is that of someone trying to stare us down rather than share a jest: an effect conveyed not only by the haughty directness of his gaze but by the thrusting elbow, presumably borrowed from Titian's equally pushy *Portrait of Man with a Blue Sleeve* of c. 1509 ([Figure 39](#)) – a painting that also caught Rembrandt's attention since he used it as a model for one of his self-portraits.<sup>56</sup> It is clear that the cavalier likes to laugh, and may be on the point of doing so, most likely at our expense. Yet there is no positive sign that laughter is in fact happening.

So where exactly does the conventional title come from? The titular gerundive is, I suspect, a transferred epithet. The cavalier does not laugh; beholders do. And how can they help it, faced with the absurd exuberance of moustache,





Figure 38. Frans Hals, *The Laughing Cavalier* (1624). Wallace Collection, London. Photo: By kind permission of the Trustees of the Wallace Collection, London/Art Resource, NY.

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Figure 39. Titian, *Portrait of a Man with a Blue Sleeve* (c. 1509). National Gallery, London. Photo: © National Gallery, London/Art Resource, NY.

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the general air of portly smugness and bombast, coupled with the fact that the sitter has managed to leave no other mark in the historical record? All signs are then that Hals is making fun of him even as he executes a likeness the sitter doubtless found flattering. The effect is similar to the one obtained in a portrait of 1636 believed to depict one Pieter Verdonck (Figure 40), a Haarlem Mennonite renowned for his bruising outspokenness in homily and debate. As Hals portrays him, Verdonck was a veritable Samson, smiting the ungodly with the jawbone of Christian oratory. In this case, however, the subject really does appear to be laughing. He visibly enjoys his pious work, and the cracked pates and fractured limbs it leaves in its wake. If Hals makes fun of him, he seems to be in on the joke.

What both of these portraits remind us is that the relation between subject and portraitist, and so between subject and beholder, is potentially ironic and adversarial. It is tempting to say, as students of Hals inveterately do, that the tendency to expose sitters to ridicule (supposing it exists) speaks to his keen eye for character and his genius at expressing it.<sup>57</sup> Judgments of this sort may even be true. Am I alone, for example, in suspecting that Hal's portrait of René Descartes (1649; Figure 41) catches just a hint of Gallic intellectual arrogance, and that Hals was not altogether mistaken in seeing the philosopher in that light? Still, the deeper point lies less in Hals's power to reveal sitters' inner characters than in whatever it is in his sitters themselves that gives character away.

By way of conclusion, let us turn to an example from Molière's *Misanthrope* (1666). The play is a "comedy of character" that explores the courtly culture of the *honnêteté* to which the title character refuses to conform for reasons that turn out to have less to do with the shameless social hypocrisies he loudly denounces than with his desire to be singled out from the rest of the pack of suitors sniffing around his mistress Célimène. In act 2, Célimène holds court. A young widow as witty as she is both beautiful and rich, Célimène is a virtuoso practitioner of the art of impromptu verbal portraits, especially of the satirical kind for which Molière's younger contemporary Jean de La Bruyère became famous. Egged on by her eager visitors, she proceeds to skewer a succession of court personalities, prompting one of her guests to propose a name. I give the exchange in both the original and Richard Wilbur's glorious translation:

CLITANDRE: Timante, encor, Madame, est un bon Caractère!

CÉLIMÈNE: C'est, de la Tête aux Pieds, un Homme tout Mystère,

Qui vous jette, en passant, un coup d'œil égaré

Et, sans aucune Affaire, est toujours affairé.

Tout ce qu'il vous débite, en grimaces, abonde;

À force de façons, il assomme le Monde;

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Figure 40. Frans Hals, *Portrait of Pieter Verdonck* (1636). National Galleries of Scotland.

Photo: © National Galleries of Scotland, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.

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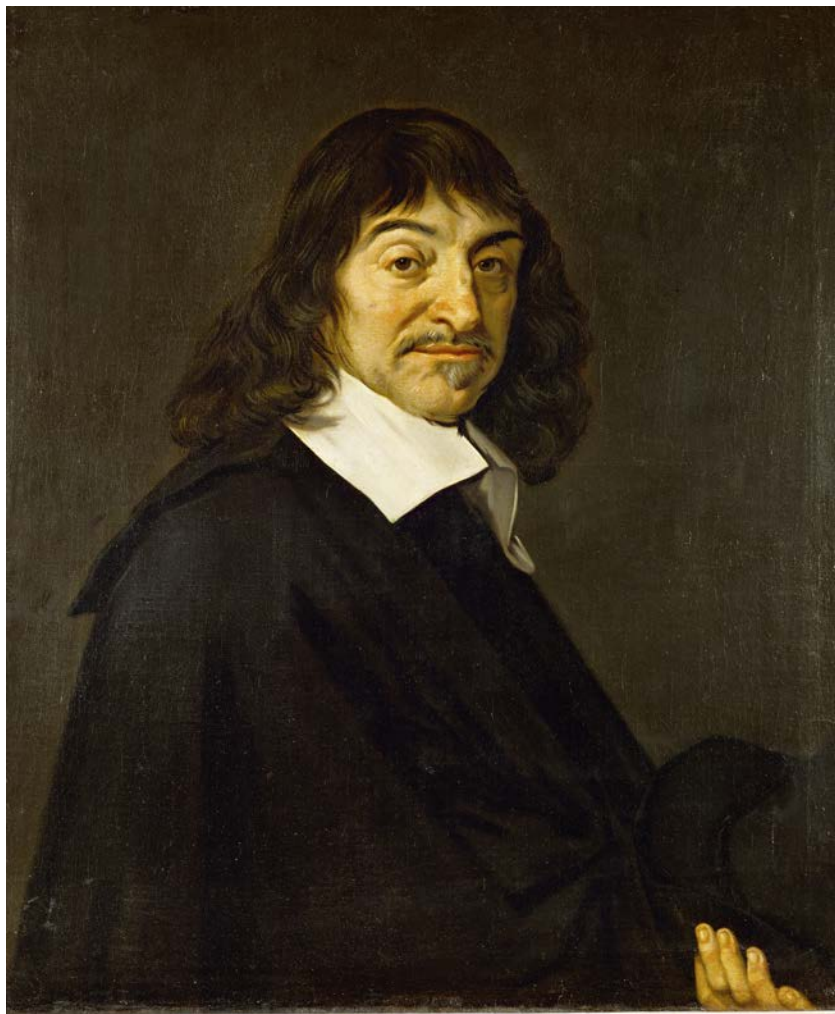


Figure 41. Frans Hals, *Portrait of René Descartes* (1649). Louvre, Paris.

Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

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Sans cesse il a, tout bas, pour rompre l'Entretien,  
 Un Secret à vous dire, et ce Secret n'est rien;  
 De la moindre Vétille, il fait une Merveille,  
 Et, jusques au Bonjour, il dit tout à l'oreille.

[CLITANDRE: Timante's a character, Madam.

CÉLIMÈNE: Isn't he, though?

A man of mystery from top to toe,  
 Who moves about in a romantic mist  
 On secret missions which do not exist.  
 His talk is full of eyebrows and grimaces;  
 How tired one gets of his momentous faces;  
 He's always whispering something confidential  
 Which turns out to be quite inconsequential;  
 Nothing's too slight for him to mystify;  
 He even whispers when he says "good-by."<sup>58</sup>

There are several reasons to dwell on this little passage, and chief among them is the sheer pleasure of Célimène's comical portrait of the self-made man of mystery. Moreover, by trying to counterfeit something like what Vasari aims at in his portrait of Lorenzo de' Medici, Timante inadvertently shows how close dissimulators of the sort he wishes he were approach self-parody. For, as his behaviour reveals just by virtue of its clumsy transparency, even accomplished dissimulation is what Célimène calls a "grimace," a recasting of one's expression that is as such only too readily mimicked and deciphered.

For our present purpose, however, the key point is the one Clitandre makes in calling Timante "a good Character" (*un bon Caractère*). At the most immediate level, he simply means that Timante's personal character is ripe for satirical portraiture: the poor man lends himself as a subject for verbal and, on stage, physical mimicry. But the term also happens to be the name for the kind of portrait in question – the kind both the French of La Bruyère and the English of his British predecessors, the John Earle of *Microcosmographie* (1608) or the Thomas Overbury of *A Book of Characters* (1614), call "a character." In this sense Timante is a good character because he already is his own satirical portrait, the all-too legible caricature of his own identity.

Just like Hals's laughing cavalier, Mennonite controversialist, and self-important French philosopher, Timante's every word and deed reveal who and what he is, whether consciously or not. Lifelike portraits are possible because the people portrayed in them are already like themselves – are indeed *just* like themselves, to the life. This is, however, not just a consequence of inner

character. Whatever the butt of a Hals portrait or a Célimènesque character may imagine that other people see, inner and outer character amount to the same thing because they are the same person. Not that people cannot have hidden depths, secrets they often manage to keep, feelings they hide, travesty, or camouflage. Nor are they incapable of change of the self-fashioning kind that peeks out at us from the self-disciplined poses they strike when sitting for portraits. It is just that there is no deep ontological difference between inside and out, and not least because we live surrounded by beings just like ourselves, as skilled as we at ferreting out those things we are most eager to conceal.

Which brings us back to the scene from Molière's *Don Juan* with which we began. Though it took Burckhardt's theory of the Renaissance individual to put them on the map, the persons that early modern portraits parade in such profusion, variety, and detail are not individuals in Burckhardt's or Nietzsche's sense. Some people shove their way to the fore. Lorenzo de' Medici and Louis XIV, Descartes and Castiglione, Jan Six and Marie Antoinette all stuck their necks out, even if only one of them had hers severed. But quite apart from the role artists played in both helping them do so and shaping how they would be perceived, they remained at the mercy of all those others whose task as well as privilege it was to see them for who they really were. The dead commander just was the pompous ass Don Juan took him for, and the probative evidence is the statue that portrays him.

# Justice in the Marketplace: The Invisible Hand in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fayre*

We turn now from the art of portraiture and the princely courts so many of its best remembered subjects inhabited to another mode of early modern experiment: the art of theatre and the public playhouses that formed such a distinctive feature of early modern life.

In Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fayre*, first staged in 1614 and published in 1631, the setting is the great Smithfield market fair held every August during the three days around the feast of St Bartholomew. The play is a stellar example of English "city comedy," a genre devoted to the satirical depiction of London daily life that flourished from the later years of Elizabeth down to the parliamentary closure of public stages in 1642.<sup>1</sup> But the play also contains a puppet show during which the Puppet Dionysius defends theatre against its Puritan enemies. Beyond offering a slice of London life seen from a generically comic angle, *Bartholomew Fayre* engages in a meta-theatrical exploration of the role theatre plays in shaping as well as portraying contemporary urban experience. Jonson's play thus provides an unusually rich opportunity to examine what one of the city's more watchful citizens made of the experiment of personhood on which early modern Londoners found themselves embarked.

It is important to stress from the outset that, more expressly than any other form of early modern English theatre, city (sometimes also called "citizen") comedy was a collective enterprise. As Steven Mullaney memorably shows, theatre occupied a strategic place on the physical as well as socio-economic map of early modern London, one that simultaneously set it apart from and put it into intense, often adversarial relation to other sites of social experience: the royal court, the inns of law, taverns, professional offices, and the city's rapidly expanding suburbs, not to mention markets like the one at Smithfield.<sup>2</sup> As Mullaney further notes, the playhouse was one of those few places where



Londoners of every stripe – lords and ladies, lawyers and tradesmen, merchants and groundlings – rubbed shoulders in a way the segregated conditions of ordinary life made more difficult.

Like any other kind of theatrical production, city comedy was also the work of many hands. The playwright (or “poet”) penned the script while professional players performed the parts. Public authorities like the Master of Revels policed both plays and the behaviour of theatre audiences, and businessmen invested money with an eye to potential profits. The general public played a role too, not only turning up in substantial numbers to pay to listen and watch but debating what they saw and heard, often while the performance was still underway. Moreover, in staging public representations in which spectators beheld a portrayal of their communal home, city comedy supplied what period theory and practice called a “mirror” in which citizens were invited to contemplate a version of themselves as well as the city in which they dwelt. In doing so, it became a living epitome of the city it portrayed – a place where Londoners went to gaze upon each other in the flesh as well as in their respective theatrical likenesses.

This last point suggests that as significant as city comedy’s collective character was the kind of candidly experimental intervention in city life that it made possible. Comic representation was not confined to displaying the world as a spectacle held at the comfortable arm’s-length between the boards on which plays were acted and the space from which spectators looked on. Like theatre in general if with far greater explicitness and point, city comedy laid hands on the urban experience it portrayed. It had topical satirical targets, taking sides in the quarrels of the day with the aim of changing as well as depicting the facts of urban life. In the induction to *Everyman out of His Humour* (1599), the sequel to Jonson’s first major popular triumph, *Everyman in His Humour* (1598), the poet puts his introductory definition of the genre’s mission in the symptomatic mouth of the malcontent Asper, a character whose very name bespeaks the venom with which he eyed his fellow citizens. Seizing the playwright’s prerogative to vent his spleen on all those he accuses of thwarting his literary as well as social ambitions, he describes the play we are about to watch this way:

I will scourge those apes.  
And to these courteous eyes oppose a mirrour,  
As large as is the Stage whereon we act;  
Where they shall see the time’s deformity  
Anatomiz’d in every Nerve, and sinew,  
With constant courage and contempt of fear.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond portraying – more exactly, in order to portray – the world as it finds it, city comedy dissects it; and what it discovers by such violent means is the “deformity” it behooves assembled citizens to acknowledge and remedy.

The theme of this chapter is then the nature and direction of the collective experience of which Jonson’s play is the image, exemplar, product, and engine. In at once depicting and intervening in the life of the city, *Bartholomew Fayre* makes things happen. It does so in the first place of course onstage, in the form of the comic action it presents. But it also does so, by indirect routes, in the outside world at large.

As we will see, much of the action in the play concerns the problems as well as powers latent in the acts of reading and spectatorship to which it commends itself. What exactly do people see and understand when they go to a play? How does this relate to what they see and understand in the world generally? And how do these matters condition the play’s place in the larger setting to which both the play and those who watch and read belong?

Jonson’s interest in these questions leads him down two contrary yet intersecting paths. The first is laid out in the play’s elaborate front matter: a prologue addressed to James I, the reigning monarch at the time when the play was initially staged; and the two-part “induction,” a dramatized introduction in which the audience is enjoined to seal a contract with the author determining the rights both parties enjoy. Taken together, the prologue and the induction spell out what the author not only expects from but demands of the audience: a genuine effort to reach a right understanding of the play’s meaning and intent. They even offer a model of what right understanding looks like by invoking the theory (and legal fiction) of sovereign decision that forms the legal basis of monarchic government: the theory of the King’s Two Bodies worked out during the reign of James’s immediate predecessor, Elizabeth I. A crucial element of both the theory and the fiction it sustains is the definition of the grounds on which the sovereign performs his (or her) core function: the act of judgment by which he (or she) ensures the rule of justice by deciding what justice dictates in one or another of the hard cases raised by the emergencies of communal life. *Bartholomew Fayre* is then, among many other things, a meditation on justice occasioned by Jonson’s insistence on the audience’s quasi-contractual obligation to do justice by judging his play according to what he takes to be its just deserts.

In return, however, Jonson engages to put on the play itself. This brings us to the second path he follows, one that runs largely perpendicular to the first. For if the main body of the play teaches anything, it is that justice cannot be done – at least not in the form in which its front matter imagines. And justice of this sort cannot be done because the world it is meant to govern inevitably defeats it.

As we have noted, much of the play's action concerns the problems as well as powers latent in how people see and understand the world around them, and more particularly the events in which they find themselves entangled. This is already a matter of judgment, and all the more radically in that judgment turns out not only to be hard but inescapably partial in every sense of the word. Different people judge things differently; and they do so as an expression not only of their different "humours" or characters but of the particular situations in which they find themselves, socially, politically, morally, intellectually. What is more, as Jonson hints in making the terms of the bargain he strikes with the public contingent on the money that changes hands when the audience first enters the playhouse, the question of who gets to judge is increasingly mediated by right of monetary acquisition. People get to judge because they pay to do so, thereby challenging the reigning theory of justice by multiplying and diversifying its contractual bases and the growing number of seats from which judgments are handed down. When we add that this is so not merely in theory but as a direct consequence of the facts of urban life as discerned above all at a fair like the one the play portrays, the scale of the experiment the play performs and of the intervention in London life it attempts to make stand out in bold relief.

The experimentally interventionist program of city comedy in general, and of Jonson's meditations on justice in particular, define the central character note of one of the chief participants in the dramatized events *Bartholomew Fayre* sets in train, Justice Adam Overdo.

Overdo makes his first entry in act 2, scene 1, the moment when, in a classically regular play of the sort Jonson prided himself on composing, a new character announces the shift from the general exposition undertaken in act 1 to the onset of the play's dramatic action properly so-called.<sup>4</sup> Overdo is the presiding magistrate in the judicial outpost that had jurisdiction over the Bartholomew market fair: the "Courts of Piepowders," from the Law French *pieds poudrés*, denoting the itinerant vendors who brought their wares to Smithfield. As a minister of the law tasked with defending the commonwealth in the king's name, Overdo has learned from long experience that his stature as a royal lieutenant paradoxically disqualifies him for the office he performs. For one thing, it induces those summoned into his presence to misrepresent the facts it is his duty to ascertain. This being so, he is obliged to depend on reports received from the numerous agents and "intelligencers" or spies he sends out on patrol. Such reports however prove far from reliable since his agents are no more trustworthy than the citizens they monitor. Describing the predicament he shares with all public servants like himself, he complains:

For (alas) as we are public persons, what do we know? Nay, what can we know? We hear with other men's ears; we see with other men's eyes; a foolish constable, or a sleepy watchman, is all our information, he slanders a gentleman, by the virtue of his place (as he calls it) and we by the vice of ours, must believe him. As a while ago, they made me, yea me, to mistake an honest zealous pursuivant [state messenger], for a seminary [a recusant priest]: and a proper young Bachelor of Music, for a bawd. This we are subject to, that live in high place, all our intelligence is idle, and most of our intelligencers knaves: and by your leave, ourselves, thought little better, if not arrant fools, for believing 'em. (2.1.24–34)

To rectify the situation, Overdo has determined to leave his court and go out into the fair to see for himself what happens there, performing an autopsy whose success hinges on the disguise he dons to conceal his true identity lest those he spies on hide what he needs to learn. So we get a variation on the device of the incognito prince that William Shakespeare had deployed in a judicial “problem” comedy of his own in 1603–4, *Measure for Measure*. For there too, disabled by his status as the “public person” meant to ensure that justice is done, Shakespeare’s Duke moves about the city in disguise to determine, and exactly “measure,” how matters truly stand.

But Jonson gives the device a twist. For unlike *Measure for Measure*’s Vincentio, in threading his way through the Bartholomew’s Day fair in search of what he likes to call the “enormities” everyone around him has an interest in concealing, Overdo winds up embroiled in the larcenous dealings he hopes to expose. Over the course of the next four acts, the justice will be beaten, thrown in the stocks, and wind up communing with the lunatic Trouble-all – a former court employee driven mad by eviction from his post, whose refusal to do anything except on the direct personal “warrant” of the man who dismissed him becomes one of the play’s chief leitmotifs. More mortifying still, Justice Overdo becomes infatuated with one Edgeworth, a pretty and well-spoken young man in whom he sees a tender victim of the wicked allurements of the age who is in fact the ringleader of most of the criminal activity at the fair. An accomplished cutpurse, Edgeworth strips Overdo’s witless brother-in-law, Bartholomew Cokes, of both his money and the contract of marriage to the play’s love interest, Grace Wellborn. And he does so not only under the justice’s very nose but at several points with what Overdo acknowledges at one point to be his own unwitting complicity.

As the fate Jonson visits on Justice Overdo indicates, the play rings lusty changes on the celebrated theme of the King’s Two Bodies, and on the theory of political sovereignty that theme helped buttress. Through its ties to the notion

of “political theology” descending from the notorious Weimar-era German jurist Carl Schmitt, the theme has come to dominate a great deal of early modern English literary scholarship: a place secured for it by seemingly unbreakable attachment to Continental theory, and more specifically the work of Walter Benjamin and Giorgio Agamben.<sup>5</sup> However, to appreciate fully how Jonson handles the theme, it will be helpful to pause a moment to reflect on the use to which it currently tends to be put in scholarly literature. For this use is coloured by curious insistence on a tragic potential that risks overshadowing the playful spirit in which Jonson deploys it. As a result, it obscures the way in which, by grounding the theme in the material as well as ideological culture of the day, Jonson endows it with an emancipatory potential current critical consensus overlooks.<sup>6</sup>

Schmitt's starting point is the definition of political sovereignty with which he opens his *Political Theology*: “Sovereign is he who decides on the exception.”<sup>7</sup> Following Thomas Hobbes, whose *Leviathan* (1651; 1668 in the Latin version Schmitt used) was a touchstone throughout his career, Schmitt takes it for granted, as a foundational fact of all political life, that, whatever form of government a given society may have, there must be a single sovereign authority. And what defines the sovereign is both the right and duty to decide what is to be done in a state of “exception” or emergency – a decision that extends moreover to determining when such a state arises. Schmitt would agree that the sovereign is also required to uphold the system of laws that govern normal civil and political life. However, there are times – those associated, for example, with natural disasters, states of war, or insoluble political crises like the one that engulfed Germany in the 1920s and ’30s, when Schmitt wrote his most important work – when the rule of law breaks down. It is the sovereign's duty to declare when such a breakdown has occurred and take whatever extra-legal measures he (or she) deems needful to restore public order. The sovereign thus has both a place within the law, since it is the law that determines who plays the role, and above it, in that the role entitles him (or her) to suspend the rule of law when he (or she) decides it is called for.

Beyond candidly stating what Schmitt takes the bare fact of the matter of sovereignty to be, what it is and must be for sovereignty to exist at all, his definition has profound metaphysical implications. And chief among these is the notion that, whatever “positive” form the law may happen to take as promulgated by those constitutionally empowered to frame it, the law itself, as such, is in its essence metaphysical. The law in fact reflects the metaphysical vision native to the society that enacts it, grounding it in the life-world peculiar to the community as a whole.<sup>8</sup> Schmitt was in this sense a sociologist: the study and interpretation of law are rooted in those of the corresponding social order. But

he was also a historian, and it is as a historian that he argues that the fundamental European model of sovereignty and law is theological.

All modern European political concepts, he insists, are “secularized” theological concepts. This is true historically in that, as Ernst Kantorowicz taught in the book that first put the theory of the King’s Two Bodies on the map, all modern Western political concepts trace back to medieval archetypes in the transformations canonists and civil lawyers imposed on Roman law.<sup>9</sup> But it is also true sociologically in that, were sovereignty a strictly positive matter, a contingent invention of the social body the sovereign governs, it would be incapable of achieving the purpose assigned it. The rule of law without which no society can function requires an extra-legal foundation whose ultimate model is God, the omnipotent creator who transcends the contingent material emergencies with which government is saddled.

The specific political consequences Schmitt drew from the metaphysics of sovereignty were infamous. He became, for a time, the “crown jurist” of the National Socialist regime by providing the legal rationale for Adolf Hitler’s seizure of dictatorial power in 1933; and his picture of the godlike sovereign underwrote the figure of the Führer as the incarnation of national identity and will, especially in defining those “friends” and “enemies” Schmitt’s later *Concept of the Political* presents as the only true protagonists of political experience.<sup>10</sup>

It comes as no surprise then that many of those most deeply attracted to his teachings have evinced considerable ambivalence. In the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, for instance, a book that has become a standard reference in early modern literary studies, Benjamin closely embraces Schmitt’s theory of sovereignty. This is in one sense only natural given the absolutist pretensions early modern monarchs nurtured: there is only one sovereign, and that sovereign is the king, absolutely. But it also gave Benjamin a conceptual tool with which to make deeper sense of the tragic plots he studied and the role early modern playwrights typically assigned the sovereign in advancing them. The momentous events of the baroque *Trauerspiel* are by definition states of exception of the sort Schmitt theorized, and it fell to the sovereign to decide what was to be done. However, even as Schmitt enabled him to map the sovereign’s role in baroque tragedy, Benjamin countered him by showing how the sovereign’s hapless “creatureliness” unfitted him for the part. Confronted with the emergencies he had to adjudicate, he almost invariably became a bloody tyrant whose chief character note was radical indecisiveness. Endowed, he wrote, with remarkably small heads like those observed in the paintings of El Greco, the kings of baroque tragic drama “sway about like torn and flapping banners,” frantically wavering between opposed courses of action until a final, desperate impulse plunges them into murderous darkness.<sup>11</sup>



Yet ambivalent or not, Schmitt's commentators remain prisoners of his metaphysics. There are many reasons for this. One is philosophical attachment to the notion of the Absolute discussed in [chapter 1](#): the idea that the sole basis for true knowledge is knowledge as such, defining the impossible standard against which such knowledge as we have is measured. We see this clearly in writers like Benjamin, Agamben, Jacques Derrida, or Roberto Esposito, all of whom in one way or another calibrate what we imagine we see, understand, and know against the blank radiance of an ideal of pure metaphysical presence that reduces all positive forms of thought to the epiphenomenal status of creaturely ruin, the ceaseless shifting traces of textual *différance*, or the agitated echo of the immemorial struggle of sacrificial Sons against lethally despotic Fathers.<sup>12</sup>

But another, related reason is the prestige surrounding Max Weber's thesis of the irretrievable "disenchantment of the world" endemic to Western modernity.<sup>13</sup> Benjamin remarks at one point that, as evinced by the doleful happenings they stage, German baroque tragedies "are not so much plays which cause mourning, as plays through which mournfulness finds satisfaction: plays for the mournful."<sup>14</sup> Like the early modern theorists of cosmic melancholia Benjamin cites, literary critics and cultural historians have grown accustomed to associating mourning and the attendant spirit of melancholy with true intellectual depth. The saturnine has become an index of seriousness, of insight into something fundamental that can be seen in no other light. Schmitt's talk of sovereign decision, of states of exception, and of politics as the life-and-death struggle of friends and enemies opens a bleak perspective darkened further by the unrelievedly misanthropic picture of human nature he shares with the two great progenitors of European political theory, Machiavelli and Hobbes. For those of us raised on a diet of Frankfurt Critical Theory seasoned by readings in Benjamin and Weber, Schmitt's theses prove irresistible.<sup>15</sup>

To all of which Schmitt adds an at once abiding and strangely seductive contempt not only for both socialism and liberal democracy but for what he regards as the debased "economism" they share.<sup>16</sup> In his view, liberals and socialists are alike in thrall to the basely material wants, needs, and remedies Agamben later associates with the biopolitics of "bare life" whose inevitable outcome as well as emblem is the concentration camp.<sup>17</sup> In arguing that the alternatives to true sovereignty as he imagines it entail a sacrifice of the deeper metaphysical horizons required for authentic communal existence, Schmitt ministers to an obscure moral lack we seem no better able to articulate than Benjamin or indeed Weber. Like Benjamin especially, we seem condemned to painfully unrequited faith in some forever delayed act of explosive Messianic violence that offers our only hope for justice, goodness, and freedom.<sup>18</sup>

It is however at just this point that Jonson's management of the theme of the King's Two Bodies and the related notion of sovereignty come to the rescue. For in exploring these matters for his own, specifically early modern purposes, he shows how we might resist the temptation to leap into the mesmerizing meta-physical abyss that Schmitt (like Benjamin) opens at our feet. And Jonson does so in the first place by reminding us that the theory of the King's Two Bodies was initially motivated by fiscal considerations of the sort Schmitt's loathing for all things "economistic" depicts as unworthy of serious notice.<sup>19</sup>

As first fully articulated by English jurists during the reign of Elizabeth, in particular in Edmund Plowden's *Law French Commentaires ou les reportes* of 1571, the theory of the King's Two Bodies was a legal fiction designed to solve a specific, technical problem. The problem was how to discriminate between the monarch's "alienable" property, those possessions sovereigns may sell or otherwise convey into other hands because they belong to them as private persons, and "inalienable" property reckoned to revert to the Crown itself as being attached to the monarch's public identity as king or queen.<sup>20</sup> This in large part reflected the peculiar nature of English political institutions. In contrast to the situation that obtained in England's *sœur ennemie* France, sovereignty in England was constitutionally defined as a common holding. Much as the Tudors and their Stuart successors would have preferred to define sovereignty on the French model, as a direct and absolute possession of the monarch in person, it was in fact shared with the sovereign's subjects in the figure of the King in Parliament.<sup>21</sup>

Sovereignty was in this sense not only a kind of joint holding but an event, coming into existence whenever king and Parliament met in joint session to decide communal matters of state. One especially important consequence was that the financial resources on which the sovereign's range of action depended were not, as in France, subject to simple royal decree. They had to be acquired with the consent of the governed in the form of taxes negotiated with Parliament. Sovereignty in England was accordingly transactional, and most especially where money was concerned – except in those carefully delimited cases where the money involved belonged to the monarch by right of private ownership.

This did not prevent either monarchs or jurists – and especially canon lawyers and "civilian" students of Roman jurisprudence less identified with the traditions of English common law – from extending the theory beyond its original fiscal basis.<sup>22</sup> To be sure, except episodically in court masques or in *tableaux d'apparat* executed by imported foreign talent like Pieter Paul Rubens's magnificent trompe-l'œil painting of *The Apotheosis of King James I* (c. 1632–4) on the ceiling of the new Banqueting House in Whitehall, the case rarely received

the full grandiose ritual expression it did across the Channel.<sup>23</sup> The fact remains that, even in England, the monarch acquires, in his or her universally acknowledged public personality as both the symbolic and positive embodiment of the nation, a political identity, and so a political authority, independent of his or her private person as an empirical individual. Nevertheless, in England at any rate, the emphasis was ultimately pragmatic rather than metaphysical. The goal of what Kantorowicz calls the king's "gemination," his division into twin identities that enable one and the same person to exist on two radically opposing ontological planes,<sup>24</sup> was not to make good a royal claim to a higher mode of existence than that enjoyed by his subjects; it was to draw the careful distinctions needed to avoid confusion between the monarch's various contrasting roles.

Nor was the risk of confusion confined to the king; it also affected those to whom royal authority was deputed in order to carry on the wide-ranging business of an increasingly complex state administration. Like the reigning monarch on whose warrant he acts, and like the early modern diplomats whose complex doings and identities Timothy Hampton vividly describes,<sup>25</sup> Jonson's Justice Overdo is a *persona mixta*, at once a private individual and a deputy of the sovereign he personates. Overdo himself makes the point on first arriving on stage in the speech from which we quoted a moment ago. His entry takes the form of a monologue in which he explains to the audience who he is and what he is doing there "in justice' name, and the King's; and for the commonwealth!" (2.1.1–2). The speech looks at first like a soliloquy: Overdo is alone onstage, so the relevant conventions seem to apply. However, as the portion of the speech cited earlier indicates by pressing so hard on combinations of first- and third-person terms of self-reference as to make spectators' presence as direct interlocutors felt, the address violates the grammatical and rhetorical norms of the public utterance of private speech.

Overdo clearly crosses the "fourth wall" that marks dramatic action off from the space the audience occupies. Even when he most clearly speaks "in character" in order to reveal his inner motives and intent, his metaleptic relation to the audience induces him to mingle first- and third-person reference to himself in a way more typical of the personified Vices and Virtues of morality plays. Such is, for example, the force of the public pledge he makes in revealing the stratagem of his disguise: "I Adam Overdo, am resolved therefore, to spare spy-money hereafter, and make mine own discoveries" (2.1.34–6). As he underscores by closing his speech in the terms he used to open it, claiming once again to speak "in justice' name, and the King's; and for the commonwealth" (2.1.41–2), his identity in time and space is complexly parcelled out between himself, his judicial office, and his part in the play on whose behalf he speaks as expressly as for justice, king, and community.

Nor is it just that Overdo exhibits, and endures, the social and psychological tension between his personal identity as a private man and his public one as justice of the peace. His private identity turns out to be as complex and divided as his public personality. In act 5, preparing to unveil his true, judicial identity to an astonished world, he fancies that, "the hour of my severity" now arrived, he will, like a god from the machine, "break out in rain and hail, lightning and thunder, upon the head of enormity" (5.2.3–5). The upshot however turns out to be quite otherwise. When the justice finally "discovers himself," the reactions are as uncontrollably yet predictably various as the people he arraigns: "What, my brother i'law!" "My wise guardian!" "Justice Overdo!" (5.5.105–7). The first of these reactions, assigned to the country bumpkin Bartholomew Cokes, bespeaks pure gormless surprise and pleasure of the sort with which that character has greeted all of the astonishing sights he has seen at the fair. The second is pronounced by Overdo's ward Grace Wellborn, whose contempt for the man has been on open display throughout, and its thrust is sardonic exasperation. The last is thus the only one that conforms to Overdo's fantasy since it is spoken by the cutpurse Edgeworth. Some of those onstage, chief among them the cutpurse himself, have reason to be afraid, seeing in the unmasked justice as it were Justice itself, come in awful retribution. The rest, however, see not only the mere man but that particular part of him most relevant to their own private relationships.

What is more, when Overdo begins to call the assembled evildoers to account, he is instantly interrupted first by John Littlewit, a law clerk (or "proctor") who has lost his wife and gone looking for her, and then by one Winwife, an unscrupulous fortune hunter who has just contracted marriage with Overdo's ward Grace under dubious circumstances we will return to later. Momentarily nonplussed, Overdo imposes silence long enough to reclaim the limelight, prefacing the coming indictment of the reprobates gathered before him in deliciously grandiloquent terms:

[L]ook upon me, O London! And see me, O Smithfield; the example of Justice, and Mirrour of Magistrates: the true top of formality, and scourge of enormity. Hearken unto my labours, and but observe my discoveries; and compare Hercules with me, if thou dars't, of old; or Columbus; Magellan; or our countryman Drake of latter times: stand forth, you weeds of enormity, and spread. (5.6.29–35)

Yet no sooner does he start issuing the promised arraignments than Littlewit's wife Win-the-Fight emerges from a tent dressed in the green smock of a prostitute, followed by Overdo's own lady, who promptly gets sick, silencing her husband for good and all.

Overdo is accordingly undone. The thunderbolt of justice drops from his hand, as harmless as the toys his brother-in-law Cokes has purchased while at the fair. Where everything in his role as magistrate has prepared both him and the audience for a climactic scene of judgment, he discovers himself to be just one more member of the crowd, and a confusedly multiple member at that: a mere private man forced to wear a variety of faces, depending on the chance unfolding of unlooked-for events. Which is why Overdo is finally upstaged altogether by Winwife's friend Quarlous, a gamester and wit who turns out to be the only person onstage capable of sorting things out since he is the only one who actually knows what has happened – and in particular Overdo's complete misreading of Edgeworth's character. Observing the silence to which Mrs. Overdo's vomiting has reduced her dumbfounded husband, Quarlous steps in to bring the proceedings to an end:

Sir, why do you not go on with the enormity? Are you oppressed with it? I'll help you: hark you, sir, i' your ear, your innocent young man, you have ta'en such care of, all this day, is a cutpurse; that hath got all your brother Cokes his things, and helped you to your beating, and the stocks; if you have a mind to hang him now, and show him your magistrate's wit, you may: but I should think it better, recovering the goods, and to save your estimation in him. (5.6.68–75)

So what exactly is Jonson up to? And how do the changes he rings on the simultaneously political, fiscal, and administrative fiction of the King's Two Bodies bear on the purpose of city comedy as he sees it?

Two features of the poet's invention point towards an answer. The first is signalled by the play's title. In all of his other forays in city comedy, Jonson focuses on the private persons who give the form its alternate name of "citizen" comedy. He portrays the life of early modern London as an expression of the individuals who lead it and the specialized perspectives these individuals afford. So we get the "humour" plays where, whether "in" or "out" of them, people representing a broad cross-section of generic Londoners perceive, act, and speak as a function of private appetite and temperament. The poet accordingly builds up a general picture of the urban scene out of the heteroclitc materials a variety of characteristic London types supply. Meanwhile, in plays like *The Alchemist* (1610) or, despite its nominal displacement to the notorious moral sinkhole of Venice, *Volpone* (1606), a narrower point of attack singles out the crimes and follies endemic to professional strivers of different sorts – the lawyers, merchants, swindlers, and would-be machiavels encountered in London streets.

Here, by contrast, the title character is a place rather than a person, and the annual event that place accommodates: the fair conducted each August at Smithfield market. The stage is, to be sure, populated by a rogue's gallery of London types, albeit in unusual profusion, drawn from an equally unusual spectrum of social castes and conditions: a justice of the peace, his watchmen, and his lady; a country bumpkin come to see the sights, and the aggrieved man-servant charged with keeping him out of trouble; a pair of idle wits on the prowl for rich widows to marry, together with an especially randy specimen of their prey; a semi-literate law clerk and his pretty young empty-headed wife; and a roaring Puritan set on decrying the fair's idolatrous offerings even as he finds subtle theological grounds for tasting them. To all of whom Jonson adds a pig-woman and her tapster, a cutpurse and the ballad singer who draws crowds of victims for him, a cashiered Welsh captain and pimp, and assorted bully-boys, horse-trainers, and layabouts – not to mention a gingerbread woman, a hobby-horse man, a custardmonger, a clothier from the North, a “corncutter” offering to cut the corns from people's feet, and a “motion-man” to work the puppets in the puppet show that sets the stage for the play's denouement. But the sheer scale and variety of the play's personnel demonstrates that the star turn belongs to the fair that calls them all together and to the commercial exchanges that shape both the uniquely collective experience Jonson depicts and the appetites that determine how his characters behave.

Further, in order to represent the fair its characters attend, the play stages one. The boards are crowded not only by an outsize cast but with everything from display booths, a pig tent, shop signs, and assorted wares to a pillory and the puppet stage on which the motion-man puts on his show. The result is a phantasmagoric whirl in which the audience loses its way as readily as the characters do. Much of the action is taken up with people like Win Littlewit, wandering astray while other people hunt for them, of paths randomly crossed only to part again just as senselessly, of gentlemen visiting sleazy precincts in which no gentleman ought to be seen, or of ladies looking for places to hide while they relieve themselves in frying pans. The general impression of aimless milling about is compounded by the number of plots Jonson sets in train. Overdo's search for “enormities” to expose jostles with Winwife's search for a marriageable widow, Quarlous's ultimately failed pursuit of Overdo's ward Grace, Grace's effort to escape marriage to Overdo's booby brother-in-law, the cutpurse Edgeworth's campaign to empty the booby's pockets, Cokes's servant Wasp's struggle to get his master safely home again, and Littlewit's desire to get in to watch the puppet show for which he composed the script. Nor is it merely a matter of heaping up a superabundance of sub-plots. The play has in fact no



overarching plot at all, having surrendered its action to the carnivalesque logic of the fair itself.<sup>26</sup>

What is true of the play's cast of characters and hypertrophic accumulation of plots proves just as true of its language. Speech, at the fair, is just as confused, tangled, and anarchic as characters' movements, projects, and conduct. As befits his status as a judge, Overdo's idiom tends towards Ciceronian orotundity, and is peppered with untranslated tags borrowed from his favourite Latin authors, his "friends" Horace, Virgil, and Lucan as well as the great Cicero himself. Other characters are equipped with tag-lines and verbal tics of their own, keyed to the social stations and temperamental humours that define their identities. The Puritan Busy goes in for an inflationary Biblical style in which echoes of the Old Testament and the Book of Revelations ("Thou art the seat of the Beast, O Smithfield," 3.6.39–40) compete to drag his meanings out beyond useful sense. The resentful Wasp is not only given to the eeyorish moroseness with which he complains of (yet also relishes) the unspeakable burden of looking after his unruly master; his watchword is "a turd i' your teeth," an insult launched at virtually everyone he meets, regardless of rank. The "horse-courser" Jordan Knockem is addicted to talk of "vapours," an expression that seems to cover highly charged emotions of any sort but that is used especially to signal outbursts of ill temper, of which the fair occasions a great many. The cashiered Welsh captain Whit turns all *th*'s into *t*'s or *d*'s and all *w*'s into *v*'s, and the pig-woman Ursula delivers virtuoso displays of colourful invective, as foul as they are copious and inventive. Meanwhile, the law clerk Littlewit has a tiresome taste for puns that sits oddly with his helplessly literal reading of shop signs like the one that bears the picture of a pig's head outside Ursula's tent:

LIT: This's fine, verily, here be the best pigs: and she does roast 'em as well as ever she did; the pig's head says.

KNO: Excellent, excellent, [...] with fire o' juniper and rosemary branches!  
The oracle of the pig's head, that, sir. (3.2.60–3)

Above all, though, as a kind of densely larded base to the play's rich linguistic ragout, is the fact that, given that we are at a fair, the dominant form of speech is that of the London streets, a colloquial tongue at times all but impenetrable to modern ears. Difficulties of this sort regularly attend the reading and hearing of early modern writing generally. We expect to need notes now and again to fathom period usage, or to make out the names for things and modes of employment for which we have no ready modern equivalents. What after all is a "pursuivant" or a "kindheart," a "horse-courser" or a "motion-man"? Still, the

obscurity produced by historical unfamiliarity is deepened by the inverse decorum Jonson observes on the score of time and place. Since the action occurs in the Bartholomew fair rather than the royal court, a middle-class parlour, or a lawyer's study, speech conforms to types foreign not only to moderns but doubtless to many of the more genteel members of contemporary audiences. In keeping with the lowlife scene, speech teems with cant words, curses, and the echoes of now-lost popular songs bound to mystify all but the most resolute antiquarian. But of course this must be the case in that the source of speech in the play is just the fair Jonson has made it his business to reproduce onstage.

All of which brings us to the second feature of the play's underlying invention that serves as a key to Jonson's intent: the sprawling complexity of the front matter both to the play itself and to the published text of 1631, putting the playbook up for sale.

The text opens with a prologue commemorating the play's performance at court in October 1614:

THE  
PROLOGUE  
TO  
THE KING'S MAJESTY.

Your Majesty is welcome to a Fair;  
Such place, such men, such language and such ware,  
You must expect: with these, the zealous noise  
Of your land's faction, scandalized at toys,  
As babies [dolls], hobby-horses, puppet-plays,  
And suchlike rage, whereof the petulant ways  
Yourself have known, and have been vexed with long.  
These for your sport, without particular wrong,  
Or just complaint of any private man,  
(Who of himself, or shall think well or can)  
The maker doth present: and hopes tonight  
To give you for a fairing [a souvenir from the fair], true delight.

Though now available for theatrical productions intent on capturing something of the play's original historical feel, the prologue was not in fact performed before the then ruling monarch it addresses. It does not serve the purpose it immediately appears to: that of introducing the play to James Stuart of what the titlepage describes as "most Blessed Memorie," greeting him to the fair Jonson's company has prepared for his "true delight." The prologue would seem rather,

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in the first place, simply to claim the lustre of having enjoyed one-time royal attendance and the royal approbation this circumstance suggests. Whatever subsequent viewers or readers may think of *Bartholomew Fayre*, James saw it, and liked it – thereby further reminding us of Jonson's long career as court poet, author of the royal masques he and the set-designer Inigo Jones put on throughout James's reign and deep into that of his successor Charles I.

The fact remains, however, that Jonson cares very deeply about what people think. Like all of the prologues, inductions, prefaces, and dedications that enrich the corpus of early modern letters, and nowhere more obsessively than in Jonson's work, the "Prologue to the King's Majesty" indexes, and attempts to mediate, a problem of reception.<sup>27</sup> Given the special difficulties we have already mentioned, the problem of reception is on this occasion unusually thorny. It is noteworthy in this connection that the opening line welcomes the king not to the playhouse but, precisely, to the fair, going on to note that he must adjust his expectations to accommodate "such place, such men, such language and such ware" as a fair typically provides. The prologue concedes then that there may be much in the play to offend polite tastes and sensibilities – including especially the "zealous noise / Of your land's faction," the growing clamour of Puritan Saints intent (one might even say hell-bent) on bringing on the millennial End Times in a radically reformed kingdom.<sup>28</sup>

The play will loyally, and at one stage quite literally, pillory the Saints in the richly ludicrous person of Zeal-of-the-Land Busy. It will thus beard the beast and, in the debate between Busy and the Puppet Dionysius, even convert him:

BUS: I am confuted, the cause hath failed me.

PUP: *Then be converted, be converted.*

LEA: Be converted, I pray you, and let the play go on!

BUS: Let it go on. I am changed, and will become a beholder with you! (5.5.98–102)

Nevertheless, whoever goes to the fair treads on treacherous ground. Not only does one run the risk of having one's pocket picked, of contracting a dose of the clap, or getting poisoned by under-cooked pig, contaminated ale, or, as Overdo bizarrely warns at one point, tobacco soaked in alligator piss (2.6.24). There is also the chance of overhearing, and passing on, seditious ideas and demands inimical to the universal harmony the monarchic form of government was meant to procure. To the problems of idiom and translation noted earlier, problems deepened by the absence of a single dominant plot designed to help us follow the course of the play's chaotically tangled action, the presence of Jonson's Puritan adds the threat of an ideological contagion of which, as we will see shortly, saintly zeal is only the most conspicuous example.

The prologue's chief function is thus to prepare its audiences and readers for everything they are apt to find confusing, offensive, and troubling at the fair just because it is a fair. But further purposes peek out of the curious quibble secreted in its title.

Jonson might have addressed the prologue to "his Majesty, the King," the standard formula to which the main body reverts in the first line. But he has instead addressed it to "the King's Majesty," a form of words that licenses him to distinguish that enigmatic quality from the king himself. The distinction introduces from the very start the theme of the King's Two Bodies to which Justice Overdo lends his voice and doings. But it also twists it. For in emphasizing the gap between the empirical man who happens to be king and the majesty with which occupation of that role invests him, it stresses the degree to which the man is answerable at once to and for the abstract substance that upholds his sovereign right. Though the main body of the prologue quickly conforms to the usage that the decorum of its ostensible courtly occasion demands, the title hints that it is neither James in his private person nor quite James in his public identity as the king that it welcomes to the fair. It is, rather, Majesty itself, signalling the active self-mastery required for James to become the king his putative majesty enjoins him to be.

The majesty the prologue invokes is a byproduct of the institution of monarchy and the role that institution assigns the person said to possess it: it emanates from the legal fiction of the Crown that defines the form of the English state. At one level, the recollection of majesty's institutional basis reminds us that the king is always virtually in attendance, whether in his own person or not. Like the magistrate whose intelligencers serve as his eyes and ears in his absence, the king goes everywhere in the form of the lieutenants who circulate in his name. James's England thus shares the never-realized ambition of all early modern states, and in particular princely ones, of policing its subjects in all times and places, and among them all public venues like theatres, alehouses, and fairs.<sup>29</sup> But, by the same token, the prologue's evocation of the Crown's institutional basis as a legal fiction enables it to address whoever happens to be king, be it James "of most Blessed Memorie" or his son Charles, or indeed anyone after Charles down to the Elizabeth Windsor of our own day.

Yet in reminding all concerned, and in the first place the king himself, that the Crown and the majesty that goes with it belong to the role rather than the role-player, it asserts the duty the player must perform to earn it. In a wonderful quibble late in the play, when the pimp Whit tries to persuade Win Littlewit and Mrs Overdo of the pleasures and privileges prostitutes enjoy, he picks up the *dee* sound in the euphemistic "lady" his confederate Knockem uses to soften the proposal's shock:

Yes fait, dey shall all both be ladies, and write Madam. I vill do't myself for dem. *Do* is a vord, and *D* is the middle letter of *Madam*, *DD*, put 'em together and make deeds, without which words are alike, la. (4.5.80–3)

Albeit with scandalous intent, Whit fingers the mechanism to which the prologue's titular pun appeals: the need for the deeds required to turn legal fiction into political reality. In entering the fair, the king must not, like the Puritan "faction" that will, we recall, eventually play a leading role in taking Charles I's royal head, be childishly "scandalized" by the sights and sounds he meets there. He must rather keep the rational grip on himself required to take them as they are, and for what they are: a natural expression of the life of his capital city. In return for the "true delight" Jonson promises, the king is enjoined to rate what he sees and hears at its true value, as being "such place, such men, such language and such ware" as make for the kind of "fairing" or gift the poet brings back from the fair in the form of the fair itself.

But the lesson addressed to the king is also addressed to everyone in attendance. Having invoked the legal fiction of the King's Majesty, the prologue goes on to invoke the language of tort law in insisting that "These for your sport, without particular wrong, / Or just complaint of any private man, / (Who of himself, or will think well or can) / The maker doth present." Needless to say, Jonson does not expect that anyone might actually sue him for an injury of the sort his increasingly litigious contemporaries so frequently filed in one or the other of England's two seats of civil law, the King's Bench and the Court of Common Pleas. There is nonetheless always the chance that someone in the audience will imagine her- or himself to be a private target of the play's public jibes. Like the king, however, they too are enjoined to get a grip for, like him, they must learn to exercise the rational self-discipline needed to take the play for the "sport" it is, and the world for the place the play loyally depicts. The point of the prologue is thus an appeal to reason as the faculty that enables human beings both to see things as they are and, as an indispensable means to that end, to govern their own anarchic notions, emotions, and perceptions.

This is the place to observe that, more than any other great English dramatist down to the Restoration era of John Dryden, Thomas Otway, and William Congreve, Jonson was an avowed classicist. The point is made not only by frequent invocations of classical learning of the sort Overdo draws on but also by the digs Jonson takes at the work of his rival, Shakespeare. For instance, in presenting the contract with the audience noted a moment ago, and to which we will turn in detail shortly, the scrivener brought on for the occasion reads out an itemized list of the comic figures the poet promises to bring on stage. Chief among these are "a wise Justice of the Peace meditant," "a civil cutpurse

searchant,” “a singer of new ballads allurant,” plus “as fresh an hypocrite, as ever was broached, rampant” (Induction 109–12). But the scrivener goes on to cite in the poet’s name what the play will *not* supply:

If there be never a servant monster i’the Fair; who can help it? he says; nor a nest of antics? He is loth to make Nature afraid in his plays, like those that beget Tales, Tempests, and such like drolleries, to mix his head with other men’s heels, let the concupiscence of jigs and dances reign as strong as it will amongst you. (Induction 112–17)

The allusions are to the Caliban of *The Tempest* (1610 or 1611) and the antic satyrs of *The Winter’s Tale* (also 1610 or 1611). True, figures like these appear in Jonson’s court masques, most memorably in *Oberon, the Faery Prince*, staged at the Palace of Whitehall in 1611, where uncouth satyrs cavort in the anti-masque as comic embodiments of the anarchic energies the title character, played by Henry, Prince of Wales, subdues for the sake of the rational order mirrored in his father James and the court that sits around him in the audience. Nothing of the kind will be found in *Bartholomew Fayre*, however, since, as Aristotle teaches in his *Poetics*, the focus of comedy is the natural world of common experience. As the scrivener reports the poet as saying, if there are no monsters or satyrs in the play, “who can help it?” There are none at the fair he has engaged to represent.

As biographers and critics have noted for many years, Jonson’s classicism was heavily overdetermined. More than an expression of the classical learning he had acquired, and so of the imitation of ancient models classical training enjoined, the assertion of a classical pedigree was bound up with his lifelong resentment at having been, as he believed, cheated of the social rank he deserved by the premature death of his gentleman father. Far from receiving the genteel upbringing he felt he was owed, he was raised by his mother’s second husband, a bricklayer whose trade Jonson learned, and to which he returned at various stages in his career to earn a living – most notably following his conviction for manslaughter in 1598.<sup>30</sup>

Jonson did have the great good fortune of catching the eye of the celebrated antiquarian and geographer William Camden, who gave him in effect the university training his humble social status denied. But Jonson was always playing catch-up, and the boastful display of classical learning served as a haughty token of the gentility he never properly achieved. This fact accounts for much of the rage driving the “Expostulation with Inigo Jones” (1631) following the break-up of their decades-long partnership as contrivers of court revels. Albeit writing with what his friend James Howell warned him was censured at court



for being a “porcupine’s quill, dipped in too much gall,” Jonson counters Jones’s presumption by insisting on the division of labour that had defined the now violated terms of their partnership. However wondrous the visual spectacles Jones created for the staging of Jonson’s masques may have been, Jonson’s role as poet was supreme. For the poem is the “soul” of the masque, the sets Jones built the “body.” Jonson was thus the true creative force, source of the inventive ideas to which the mere “tire-man” and “carpenter” Jones gave physical but for that very reason inferior expression.<sup>31</sup>

Overdetermined or not, however, Jonson’s classicism wed him to the absolutist theory of knowledge discussed in [chapter 1](#): the epistemological standpoint that, for all his comedies’ gritty realism, and for all that realism was coloured by Jonson’s embittered social experience and ambition, made him a champion of the absolutist theory of sovereignty we meet everywhere in his work.<sup>32</sup> But it also made him a proponent of the notion that the classically inflected and personified Nature to which his city comedies in general and *Bartholomew Fayre* in particular remained polemically faithful was an essentially rational force: one that, as such, was inherently timeless and immutable.

The problem was – and is – that, as Nature herself teaches through the facts of common experience Jonson is loath to transgress, she is only known to be timeless and immutable by those trained and equipped to understand her. Whence, once again, the dualism asserted in the “Expostulation with Inigo Jones,” where it is the changeless “soul” with which the poet infuses court masques that takes precedence over the ephemeral deal boards and scene painting of set design. But whence too the dualism implicit in Jonson’s theory of sovereignty, and in the image thereof proposed both in the prologue and in the at once moral and political lesson taught by the comic catastrophe that overtakes the sovereign’s stand-in in the play, Adam Overdo.

The character’s name says it all. On the one hand there is the “overreach” inscribed in Overdo.<sup>33</sup> Overdo seriously deludes himself in imagining that, “in justice’ name, and the King’s; and for the commonwealth,” a public figure can overcome his ongoing stature as a mere private man in such a way as not only to fathom all of the “enormities” at work in the world but know them for what they are. It is not just that there will always be much that escapes his unassisted investigations. He consistently gets everything wrong, and most especially the true character of the charming young cutpurse Edgeworth.

He does, it is true, have a moment of humbling insight in the aftermath of the cudgeling Wasp gives him following Cokes’s loss of his purse in the confusion Overdo creates in delivering an impromptu public sermon on the evils of tobacco and ale:

To see what bad events may peep out o' the tail of good purposes! The care I had for that civil young man I took fancy to this morning (and have not left it yet) drew me to that exhortation, which drew the company, indeed, which drew the cutpurse; which drew the money; which drew my brother Cokes his loss; which drew on Wasps's anger; which drew on my beating: a pretty gradation! (3.3.11–17)

Nevertheless, Overdo only learns the moderation required to become the genuinely “wise Justice of the Peace meditant” the induction promises when, in the denouement, he is finally compelled by events to acknowledge, as Quarlous puts it, that “you are but Adam, flesh and blood” (5.6.89). For it is only then that he undergoes the orthopsychic conversion that enables him to see the truth. But it is also then that Overdo comes into authentic rather than merely rote possession of the wisdom imbibed from the writings of the Latin poets he cites at every turn. For moderation and the truths moderation empowers him to grasp are the redemptive lesson classical authors have taught from time immemorial – lessons the poet Jonson passes on in turn, securing thereby induction into their timeless number.

Such then is the appeal to reason the prologue addresses to the king, as to those members of the general public capable of grasping it. Like the masques on which Jonson collaborated with Inigo Jones, *Bartholomew Fayre* has a soul formed by the rational invention that governs it. And yet it is here that the two features of the play that point to the poet's overarching intention, the staging of the fair and the elaborate paratext, come together – but to an effect Jonson, the classical poet, may well have been reluctant to admit. For what makes *Bartholomew Fayre* the work of genius I take it to be as well as a symptom of the labile ideological complexities of the age is the way it winds up rubbing against the grain of its own governing ideals.

It is tempting, for example, to think that the central goal of the play has been the lesson Overdo learns. The representative of sovereign justice has finally tumbled to the rational basis of justice itself; and he does so by acknowledging the limits imposed on his own personal as well as institutional powers by his nature as a fallible human being. The reign of true justice is accordingly at hand, at least to the extent that the play's justicer (and, by implication, the king) has now acquired a clearer sense of where justice lies, and how to get there. Yet inconvenient facts keep getting in the way.

For a start, as noted earlier, it does not fall to Overdo to set things right, or even to state the play's moral. The honour goes to the unscrupulous gamester Quarlous. The agent of classical sanity is thus the trickster who figures out how to cheat Cokes of his promised bride by blackmailing the cutpurse into

stealing the marriage contract from the box in which Wasp guards it and then scratching Cokes's name out in order to replace it with Winwife's. And though he himself loses the beautiful (as well as wealthy) Grace Wellborn in a silly lottery in which the madman Trouble-all picks the name that Winwife put down in Grace's commonplace book rather than his own entry, he consoles himself by marrying Dame Purecraft: the randy widow who brings him not only the £6,000 inherited from her dead husband but the confidence game she has been running to fleece guileless Puritans of their lifesavings.

Nor does either of these plots, Overdo's pursuit of justice or Quarlous's of a fortune, come anywhere near digesting everything else that happens at the fair. Grace escapes marriage to the idiot Cokes – though it remains to be seen how wise it was to tie herself to the outcome of a lottery or what conjugal happiness she can expect from union with the fortune-hunting Winwife. John Littlewit gets to see his puppet show performed even if it is quite possible (the details are murky since the “deeds” Whit speaks of take place inside Ursula's pig tent) that he has been cuckolded by one of the whoremasters into whose clutches Win-the-Fight falls. Though Edgeworth is publicly exposed as a thief in the end, he will at least be spared hanging; and Cokes gets to see the sights, and get most of his money back, even if he has been stripped of his bride and the cartload of hobbyhorses, drums, tin trumpets, and gingerbread he purchased from vendors who sneak off with them again when nobody is looking. Even Zeal-of-the-Land Busy makes out like a bandit. He gets to eat lots of pig meat without having to pay for it, and gets invited to supper at Overdo's house along with everyone else still onstage at the final curtain. And though he is defeated in his debate with the Puppet Dionysius when shown that the lewd puppets against whose purported sexual depravity he fulminates have in fact no sexual parts, he does wind up enjoying the show, planting himself on the ground to watch, as slack-jawed as the foolish Cokes at his side.

Despite the many inconsistencies involved, one could argue that, taking things all in all, justice has in fact been done. Busy's contrapostal conversion to a love of puppet shows offers a model here. More to the point, the play has a happy ending, sealed in the immediate aftermath by a shared meal at Overdo's table (and expense). But the question remains: who, or what, has achieved all this happiness? Overdo's newfound moderation does not have much to do with it – no more than Quarlous's cynical calculation of what he stands to gain by binding himself to the swindling widow Purecraft or helping the cutpurse Edgeworth escape hanging. To the extent that there is a beneficent agent at work here at all, it is the fair itself, stimulating the multifarious exchanges by which the injuries all of the characters suffer are made good despite the many crimes and acts of folly they commit.

Though it will not receive its classic and authoritative (if paradoxical) articulation until Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* of 1714, the workings of Jonson's fair already show how "private vices" yield "public benefits." Jonson would surely have bristled at the unseemly complacency with which Mandeville draws the laughing Moral of "The Grumbling Hive: or, Knaves Turn'd Honest," the verse fable that heads up his book:

Then leave Complaints: Fools only strive  
To make a Great an honest Hive.  
T'enjoy the World's Conveniencies,  
Be famed in War, yet live in Ease  
Without great Vices, is a vain  
*Eutopia* seated in the brain.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, on the evidence of the way his play turns out, the anticipation of Mandeville's doctrine is obvious.

As we have seen, in the soliloquy in which he comes to terms with the role he played in getting his brother-in-law's purse stolen, Overdo exclaims, "To see what bad events may peep out o' the tail of good purposes!" The play as a whole in effect turns the dictum on its head by showing what good events may come of evil ones. And what is this if not the amoral moral to which Mandeville points? The "private wrongs" of which the prologue speaks turn out to work in the service of the commonwealth that Overdo had thought to champion by tracking "enormity" to its lair. In this sense, the moral is less the moderation Overdo learns than *laissez-faire*. Leave it to the market – more specifically, to the supervenient sum of the private projects the market induces people to undertake – and everything will turn out for the best.

We turn at last to the main item in the play's elaborate foretext: the "induction to the stage" with which the play proper remarkably begins.

The first character to appear onstage is the "stage-keeper," the elderly man whose job it is to sweep the boards clean. As he explains, he has been sent out to warn the audience of a hitch in the proceedings. The actor assigned the role of John Littlewit has developed a run in his stocking, so the start has been put on hold while it gets stitched up backstage. However, the stage-keeper is a garrulous old sod, so he seizes the opportunity to share his personal opinion of the play the audience is about to watch. It is not at all flattering. The trouble, as he sees it, is that the poet does not know what he is talking about:

[F]or the whole play, will you ha' the truth on't? (I am looking, lest the poet hear me, or his man, Master Brome, behind the arras) it is like to be a very conceited  
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scurvy one, in plain English. When't comes to the Fair, once: you were e'en as good go to Virginia, for anything there is of Smithfield. He has not hit the humours, he does not know 'em; he has not conversed with the Bartholomew-birds, as they say. (Induction 6–12)

At one level, the stage-keeper's complaint echoes a theme sounded in the prologue. The play presents the Bartholomew's Day market fair, and this in turn dictates what spectators can expect to see and hear. But this expectation entails an important corollary. To judge the play's value, one must have some notion of what the fair is actually like. This is, after all, a city comedy, and the whole point of city comedy is to convey a realistic picture of the urban scene. True, the play should also be entertaining, though, for his money, the stage-keeper has doubts on that score too. Indeed, from his standpoint, the play is most notable for all the things it lacks:

[The poet] has ne'er a sword and buckler man in his Fair, nor a little Davy, to take toll o' the bawds there, as in my time, nor a Kindheart, if anybody's teeth should chance to ache in his play. Nor a juggler with a well-educated ape to come over the chain, for the King of England, and back again for the Prince, and sit still on his arse for the Pope, and the King of Spain! None of these sights! Nor has he the canvas-cut i' the night, for a hobby-horseman to creep in to his she-neighbour, and take his leap there! Nothing! (Induction 12–19)

Whatever we think of the man's taste, the point is that everything he misses has the warrant of experience in its favour. If you have been to the fair, you will know that these are just the kinds of things you would expect to see there even if, on this occasion, you will be disappointed.

It is already telling that the criticisms the stage-keeper voices betray the logic of bilateral expressiveness met earlier in this book. On the one hand, he makes an appeal to empirical observation. To know what the fair is like, you have to visit one – just what the stage-keeper suspects the poet has never done. On the other hand, what you will observe there will largely be a function of who you are. In challenging the accuracy of the poet's knowledge, the stage-keeper reveals his own partiality:

I'll be judged by you, gentlemen, now, but for one conceit of mine! Would not a fine pump ha' done well, for a property now? And a punk [prostitute] set under upon her head, with her stern upward, and ha' been soused by my witty young masters o' the Inns o' Court? What think you o' this for a show now? (Induction

26–31)

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In visiting the fair in the past, he has above all seen what he likes to see: swordplay and kindhearts, a monkey jumping over a chain or sitting on its arse, or a punk upended in a water tank by marauding law students.

It is important, however, that the stage-keeper is no less true to the fair for seeing things in the, in every sense, partial way he does. For he is himself every bit as much a part of the fair as anything observed there. He may not be a Bartholomew-bird in his own right, but he is clearly the kind of person who would be well acquainted with the tribe; and it is pre-eminently to interests and appetites like his that the fair ministers, giving him what he wants in large part just because he wants it. The question of wanting, here, anticipates a motif that resounds throughout the play: the vendor's cry, "what is't you lack?" To be sure, as witnessed above all by the frenzy of buying in which Cokes indulges, it may very well be that you will not know what you lack until somebody offers to sell it to you. Lack, in the play, is not simply a function of what people want as an expression of a rational appraisal of their needs. It is also a product of the fair itself, something they can be induced to want by, say, the cries and oracular shop signs they encounter, or by the alluring aroma of roasting pig that steers Busy to Ursula's tent in act 3, scene 2, to the accompaniment of the hound-like grunts and snorts he makes.

There is, then, no way to strike a detached, impartial stance on the fair; and even if there were, everything the vendors do is designed to overcome the kind of epistemic detachment that Overdo mistakenly fancies is one of his character notes. To know the fair, you must go there. But to go there is to fall subject to the enticements its inhabitants are in the business of exposing you to. But that is of course just what a fair is meant for: to satisfy needs there is no other means of meeting while stimulating still further needs you did not know you had until some vendor persuades you to part with the money for them.

But what is true of the fair is equally true of theatre – and not least because, like the fair, theatre is in the business of taking your money. We come to the point in the induction where the stage-keeper is replaced by the book-holder and the scrivener: the former the prompter tasked with helping actors out when they forget their lines, the latter a law clerk charged with drawing up legal documents, and more particularly contracts like the one he now reads on the book-holder's cue:

Articles of Agreement, indented, between the Spectators or Hearers, at the Hope on the Bankside, in the County of Surrey on the one party; and the Author of *Bartholomew Fair* in the said place, and County on the other party: the one and thirtieth day of October 1614, and in the twelfth year of the Reign of our Sovereign



Lord, James by the grace of God King of England, France, and Ireland; Defender of the Faith. And of Scotland the seven and fortieth. (Induction 56–63)

There are many curious things to note about this contract. In the first place, it is what period law would have called “preposterous,” a term the contract itself deploys when spectators are asked to clap their hands “in witness” of agreement to its terms.<sup>35</sup> For as the contract points out, “you have preposterously put to your seals already” in paying for your seats (Induction 134–6). The contract accordingly provides the occasion to think about what it means to pay for a seat at the playhouse, and to begin with the fact that it involves a contract of some sort, however preposterous that may seem.

As Luke Wilson observes in an illuminating book on law and literature in early modern England, the “consideration” at issue here, that is, a matter of perceived value that may also provide grounds for some sort of legal action, is *assumpsit*, Latin for “he promised.” As it happens, the doctrine of *assumpsit* was much in the air of London legal circles in the years leading up to *Bartholomew Fayre*’s premiere. It formed the subject of a famous lawsuit known as “Slade’s Case,” said to have laid the basis for modern English contract law.<sup>36</sup> A man named Humphrey Morley had agreed to buy a crop of wheat and rye from the grain merchant John Slade, for which he was expected to pay £16 on taking possession at harvest time. Whether because he was unhappy with the harvest or no longer needed the grain, Morley refused to take the crop or pay for it, at which point Slade took him to court. The problem – exacerbated by the fact that there were, at the time, two quite separate systems of civil law vying for supremacy in England, the King’s Bench and the Court of Common Pleas – was that of determining the exact grounds on which Slade could sue, the material “consideration” that, in guiding the conduct of his affairs, could serve as the basis for legal action.

From the standpoint of the Court of Common Pleas and the tradition of common law it applied, the only grounds could be debt. For Common Pleas, the question was whether Morley had incurred a debt to Slade or not; and since the agreement antedated the moment at which the exchange of grain for money was due to take place, the likely answer was no. This explains why, on advice from counsel, Slade decided to file suit not in the Court of Common Pleas but in King’s Bench, the generally more forward-looking (and so “modern”) court in which the theory of *assumpsit* had grown up. From this perspective, the point at issue was that Morley had promised. While he had not, at the time of the original agreement, contracted the explicit debt the Court of Common Pleas demanded since no goods or money changed hands, he had nonetheless

engaged to purchase Slade's crop when harvested. Despite the fact that nothing had changed hands, and despite the temporal interval between agreement and execution, Morley could still be held liable since Slade's actions subsequent to agreement had been premised on the understanding the two had reached. Contract, in this view, was no longer bound by the here-and-now of the moment at which goods or services were received and a debt incurred. It could, rather, be enforced on the strength of what Wilson terms the "fiction of subsequence."<sup>37</sup> Morley had bound himself there and then to perform what he had contracted to do later: buy Slade's grain for the £16 he promised, whether he still needed (or was happy with) Slade's harvest or not.

There were, it is true, other matters discussed, and among them the question of "double remedy": the notion advanced by Common Pleas that, if *assumpsit* were allowed, Morley might find himself held liable on two different grounds for a single action. And there was also the rivalry involved between two different systems of law – a rivalry of which the potential for "double remedy" was an artefact since each court had its own notions about what constituted actionable consideration in the case. Our chief concern here however, especially since King's Bench won in the end, making *assumpsit* the law of the land, is the conceit Jonson's ludic contract trades on. In taking spectators' money, has the poet on whose behalf the contract is drawn up promised anything? And if he has promised something, can he claim that the audience has promised something in return over and above the money its members have already "preposterously" paid?

Whatever the strictly legal rights and wrongs in the case, and in the spirit of sport the prologue has promised the King's Majesty, the contract answers yes on both counts. Jonson has promised a play, complete with all the characters and incidents specified in the contract, and omitting all those other characters and incidents the contract further specifies – those whose absence the stage-keeper laments. In exchange, the members of the audience pledge to do what they will have to anyway: not only sit through the play from one end to the other, in failing which they cannot expect to get their money back, but, further, to *judge* it. Like the stage-keeper who greets them when the curtain rises, they will enjoy (or despise) the play for reasons of their own, and with an intensity they are perfectly free to express – subject, however, to certain limits. As the contract puts it:

It is further agreed that every person here, have his or their free-will of censure, to like or dislike at their own charge, the Author having now departed with his right: it shall be lawful for any man to judge his six pennorth, his twelve pennorth, so to his eighteen pence, two shillings, half a crown, to the value of his place: Provided

always his place get not above his wit. And if he pay for half a dozen, he may censure for all them too, so that he will undertake that they shall be silent. He shall put in for censures here, as they do for lots at the lottery: marry, if he drop but sixpence at the door, and will censure a crown's worth, it is thought there is no conscience, or justice in that. (Induction 75–85)

Needless to say, the limits the contract sets on spectators' right to judge are not only offered in jest but meaningless: there is no such thing as liking (or disliking) something to the tune of sixpence, two shillings, or half a crown. As we have just noted, spectators will judge the play by their own lights, and as vociferously as they please; nor is there any way to determine, let alone enforce, to what monetary value they may do so. And besides, as the contract stipulates, the moment the poet presents his work in public, he surrenders it, "departing" with whatever right he had to dictate how it should be seen, heard, or read.

Still, the precise terms of the promises made on one side or the other are immaterial. What matters is that promises have in fact been made, and that the glue that holds together the common enterprise in which the parties find themselves embarked is the fact that money has changed hands. Like Littlewit in the play, Jonson will get an audience for his work, and a little hard cash besides. The audience, meanwhile, will get a play – with luck they will even enjoy it. But even if they do not, they will get to exercise their powers of judgment to their hearts' content: a privilege as well as pleasure secured by the money they put down. As noted earlier, in order to represent a fair, the play is obliged to stage one. To that extent, it becomes what it depicts. We now see that theatre is itself a market like any other, and what people purchase there, besides pleasure, is the sovereign right to judge.

The contract spells out circumstances implicit in the publicity function performed by the prologue's commemoration of a performance at court. Jonson's dramatic version of the world of the marketplace is just as much for sale as any of the dozens of articles for which money changes hands onstage. The work of art thus inscribes its transformation into a commodity, its subjection to the rapacious economic energies of which the marketplace was, and is, at once a symptom and an engine. But the play's transformation into an item of monetary exchange is not just the kind of radical alienation that the still reigning neo-Marxist conventions of literary scholarship would have us suspect. Hard as Jonson notoriously felt the knocks he received from a public whose ignorance and debasement he ceaselessly decried, it remains at liberty to pronounce on the play as it pleases.<sup>38</sup> The sale of his work nonetheless earned him a living and, further, enabled him to reach an audience he would not otherwise have had.

This brings us to a point promised in the introduction. As we will see more specifically in a moment, in making the St Bartholomew's Day market fair the central protagonist of his play, Jonson anticipates what, in *The Wealth of Nations* of 1776, Adam Smith will call the "invisible hand" of the marketplace.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, like Smith, though acutely conscious of the Overdone "enormities" to which unbridled commercial rapacity can lead, Jonson takes, on the whole, a whiggish view of the workings of the fair. The play thus challenges the currently fashionable critique of "the liberal subject" or of "economic man" associated with Michel Foucault's analyses of "biopolitics" and human "governmentality."

In the light of the lectures gathered in Foucault's *Birth of Biopolitics*, delivered at the Collège de France during the 1978–9 academic year, the apparently emancipatory workings of modern markets have come to be seen as increasing human subjection to normative modes of thought, sensibility, and behaviour. For one thing, as Foucault argues in his introductory lecture, for all the talk of free markets, the immediate agent and beneficiary of the new market economy was in fact the state.<sup>40</sup> It was, for instance, the government's duty to help free markets work their benevolent magic by limiting its own power over economic life. This already engendered the paradox of what came to be called "political economy." For, as a social phenomenon, the productive strength of the liberal economy is supposed to be entirely apolitical in the sense that markets emerge and evolve as a self-organizing expression of impersonal material laws of their own in which government should intervene as little as possible. And yet of course, as Smith himself readily pointed out in tacit response to the paradoxes of Mandevillian laissez-faire, markets needed regulation if only because the pursuit of profit occasioned, where it did not actively encourage, cheating, fraud, and theft of many kinds.<sup>41</sup> The lesson is drawn in Overdo's first monologue, when he explains his motives in entering the fair in disguise by citing the example of one of his judicial brethren:

Never shall I enough commend a worthy worshipful man, sometime a capital member of this city, for his high wisdom, in this point, who would take you, now the habit of a porter; now of a carman; now of the dog-killer, in this month of August; and in the winter, of a seller of tinder-boxes; and what would he do in all these shapes? Marry, go you into every alehouse, and down into every cellar; measure the length of puddings, take the gauge of black pots, and cans, aye, and custards with a stick; and their circumference, with a thread; weigh the loaves of bread on his middle-finger; then would he send for 'em home; give the puddings to the poor, the bread to the hungry, the custards to his children; break the pots, and burn the cans himself; he would not trust his corrupt officers; he would do't himself. (2.1.11–24)

The trouble is however that, as Overdo also observes, government agents like his worshipful colleague and himself cannot be everywhere. Though the problem was wholesale, the available solutions were retail and could not keep up. What was missing was what, during the reign of Charles I, the king's two chief advisors, Archbishop Laud and the Earl of Strafford, termed the policy of "thorough": an efficient, systematically rational mode of governance that could only be achieved once the king's subjects were taught to police themselves.<sup>42</sup> Strafford's contribution lay in trying to create a disciplined bureaucracy that outlawed graft and carefully trained functionaries for the role they were expected to play. Laud's was to promote right-mindedness by enforcing religious conformity. Though their efforts failed, bringing both men to the scaffold, Laud in 1645 and Strafford in 1641, they nonetheless pointed the way that not only subsequent governments but also the economic institutions they sought to govern would follow. For governments, this meant perpetrating what Foucault and his successors regard as the swindle of the "autonomous liberal subject," a being whose inner sovereignty is defined by the kind of rational self-control that makes the state's job easy. For the new commercial, industrial, and banking interests, the task was to create a disciplined workforce, but also, as underscored by John Littlewit's encounter with "the oracle of the pig's head," by turning people into consumers governed by readily monetized desires it became business's business to excite in them.

As Foucault sees it then, there were in fact, from the start, two invisible hands at work, that of the market and that of the modern bureaucratic state. And the ultimate effect they produced, as the price exacted for the seeming freedom they gave the emergent "liberal subject," was human self-subjugation to patterns of thought, feeling, and conduct dictated by the impersonal (and so depersonalizing) needs of commercial as well as political administration.<sup>43</sup> The undeniable advances that industrialization, urbanization, accelerated modes of communication, and the rationalization of state operations have achieved in living conditions have been paid for by internalized enslavement to the standardized forms of private intention and experience that both markets and governments require to function smoothly. The individual freedom early modern liberalism associated with contract law, for example, is accordingly portrayed as an illusion in that the true outcome of the personal rights that the law of contract affirms is in fact ever deeper biopolitical control over the private lives of an increasingly "disciplined" or regimented citizenry.<sup>44</sup>

However, if the experience of Jonson's characters teaches anything, it is how one-sided this bleak picture of the rising liberal economy is. True, the enhancement of personal freedom not only from material want (which is, after all, itself no mean achievement) but also from the arbitrary decrees of social

superiors has been made possible in great part by an overarching legal, political, and economic machinery that constrains our lives even as it improves them. Nevertheless, as Steve Pincus's richly revisionary history of the Glorious Revolution of 1688–9 points out, the same machinery that enabled the state of James II to inject itself into the private lives of its subjects empowered those subjects to overthrow it.<sup>45</sup> And even if a signal outgrowth of this overthrow was the promotion of commercial, banking, and industrial interests as predatory as the royal dynasts they replaced, the energies the Revolution unleashed were as latently democratic as they were corporatizing.

Such is, if not quite the lesson, at any rate the hope enacted in Jonson's play. To the extent that Jonson might find a modern theoretical gloss, it would be in Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* far more than in Foucault. Certeau explores what the original French title of his book calls "the invention" of everyday life, by which he means above all its powers of ingenuity, and so its inalienable creativity.<sup>46</sup> A good French critical theorist as well as a psychoanalyst, historian, and Jesuit student of mystical experience, Certeau is keenly sensitive to the awesome powers of psycho-cultural domination to which ordinary little people are subjected in modern post-industrial societies. The very language they speak and the very concepts they learn to use, abetted by the enormous bureaucracies with which they have to deal, threaten at every point to channel them into a condition of mute subservience. Certeau's man-in-the-street is indeed turned into an anonymous statistical "each," "any," or "everyone" (*chacun*) who is in fact "nobody" (*personne*), one of an infinite number of data points unable to perceive let alone resist the immense socio-historical coercions Foucault describes with curiously complacent horror. And yet for all their powerlessness, Certeau's little people not only make do but also make out in arrestingly inventive ways. When attended to closely, the *bricolage* of everyday life, the shortcuts, back alleys, and cross routes that enable ordinary citizens to thread a course through the modern metropolis in pursuit of personal goals often at significant variance with official norms, reveal a freedom that the supposedly overmastering predeterminations of High Critical Theory portray as illusion.

But what is this if not an updated, theoretically sophisticated version of what *Bartholomew Fayre* portrays? In the denouement, when Justice Overdo "discovers" his identity as royal Justice in person, only to discover that the pretty young man he has followed about the fair all day with such infatuated concern is in fact a cutpurse, a stage direction notes that "[t]he rest are stealing away." As the horse-courser Knockem says to the cashiered Welsh captain, "Would we were away, Whit, these are dangerous vapours, best fall off with our birds, for fear o' the cage." And when Overdo tries to prevent them – "Stay, is not



my name your terror?” – Whit replies, “Yesh faith man, and it ish for tat, we would be gone, man” (5.6.7–11). This is of course comedy, so no one is meant to hang. But like the gingerbread woman and hobbyhorse man who earlier make away with the goods that the feckless Cokes bought from them, they escape the noose on their own.

Most striking of all, however, is the situation to which the ludic contract read out in the induction draws our attention in addressing the spectator’s right of judgment over the play. By stipulating that each spectator’s right to judge is indexed to the price of the seat he or she occupies, the induction formally cedes a warrant spectators already enjoy. The contract accordingly highlights how processes of exchange reshape social identities and relationships in ways as potentially emancipatory as they are disruptive. The play acknowledges sinister undertones. There is, for instance, the plight of Grace Wellborn, an orphan girl whose guardianship Overdo purchased from the Court of Chancery, granting him arbitrary control over her fate by right of monetary acquisition. And there is also the disturbing case of poor Trouble-all, driven mad by Overdo’s exercise of the prerogative he enjoys to hire and fire at will. Still, when even the almost certainly illiterate stage-keeper gets to voice an opinion, an opinion we may quarrel with and deprecate without for all that being entitled to deprive him of it, the whole world turns out to have gone to the fair. And what they find there looks awfully like freedom. This offers a no doubt unduly cheerful image of how markets work. But it does suggest the need to strike a greater balance than our current Foucauldian or neo-Marxist orthodoxies allow.

As mirrored then in Jonson’s fair, the social and cultural order undergoes startling mutations, and the agent of those mutations is the one Smith identifies in *The Wealth of Nations*. Insofar as the play can be truly said to have a single overarching plot, it is the fate to which the market’s invisible hand consigns both judgment and the system of justice that “right” judgment strives to maintain in the person of the overweeningly interventionist Overdo. It is not simply that, anticipating the demoralized moral of Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees*, the play implicitly argues the antinomian virtues of laissez-faire – and this against the grain of Jonson’s polemical and elitist classical instincts. It assigns the market a transformative power whose form is that of Wilson’s “fiction of subsequence.” For all Jonson’s absolutist insistence on the timeless immutability of the canons of taste and, underwriting these as their transcendental warrant, the canons of both reason and nature that the ancients taught, the play commits him to the relentless shape-shiftings incident to the market-driven world of time and change – and, to begin with, those that colour our conceptions of ancient example itself.

This last point is most directly visible in the metamorphoses *Bartholomew Fayre* visits on the classical library on which the poet draws, and nowhere more conspicuously than in the puppet show by which the Puritan Busy is converted in the final act. As the motion-man Lanthorn Leatherhead explains, though the puppet show has a classical pedigree in line with his poet's literary ambitions, he asked Littlewit to update the material to bring it into closer alignment with contemporary taste and experience (5.4.96–7). The result is a mash-up of two classical tales, *Hero and Leander* and *Damon and Pythias*. Setting the first in present-day London, Littlewit turns the Hellespont that Leander swims to join his love into the Thames; and rather than breast the tide, he crosses it in a ferry operated by a querulous Cockney boatman named Old Cole, whose crotchety byword is “kiss my hole, and smell.” Hero herself becomes a punk, and the Cupid who inspires her love for Leander is a tapster who exchanges his traditional bow and arrows for a pint of sack. Meanwhile, Damon and Pythias stray from their own tale only to get entangled in Leander's. For they become as infatuated with Hero's charms as he, and display their legendary friendship by bashing each other about the head with sticks, unleashing their rage on the puppet master when he intervenes to stop them. As staged by the oxymoronically named Lanthorn Leatherhead in the teeth of repeated interruptions by the irrepressibly enthusiastic Cokes and the clamorously iconoclastic Busy (“Down with Dagon, down with Dagon; ’tis I, will no longer endure your profanations”) (5.5.1–2), the show is at once grotesque and invincibly funny. But it is also a *mise-en-abyme*, a miniature representation of the play as a whole in which the play itself in turn emerges as a microcosm of the urban world of which it is at once an item of conspicuous consumption and a strangely perspicuous mirror.

The puppet show brilliantly enacts the process of blind, seemingly senseless historical transmutation whose agent is the market at which it takes place. Jonson pillories the debased taste of the age to which his profession as poet and actor compelled him to cater. But the fact that the puppet show is delightful, coupled with the opportunity it presents to mount an apology for the stage in the Puppet Dionysius's triumph over Busy, indicates that it does a lot more than that. For the debasement of classical tales by transposition to the contemporary urban scene captures the very form of historical change if only because it is as such a prime example of what the public is prepared to pay for. Early modern London is the ancient world made new, to an effect no one can foresee or escape. And it is so not only because material conditions have changed but above all because people's *minds* have changed, and people along with them. For minds turn out to be as volatile as the market forces that remap the city.

The timely untimeliness of socio-economic change dictates the significance of the final portion of the contract the induction promulgates. Having stipulated



Plate 1. Caravaggio, *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1598–99). Palazzo Barberini, Rome. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

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Plate 2. Andrea Pozzo, *Entry of St. Ignatius Loyola into Paradise* (c. 1707).

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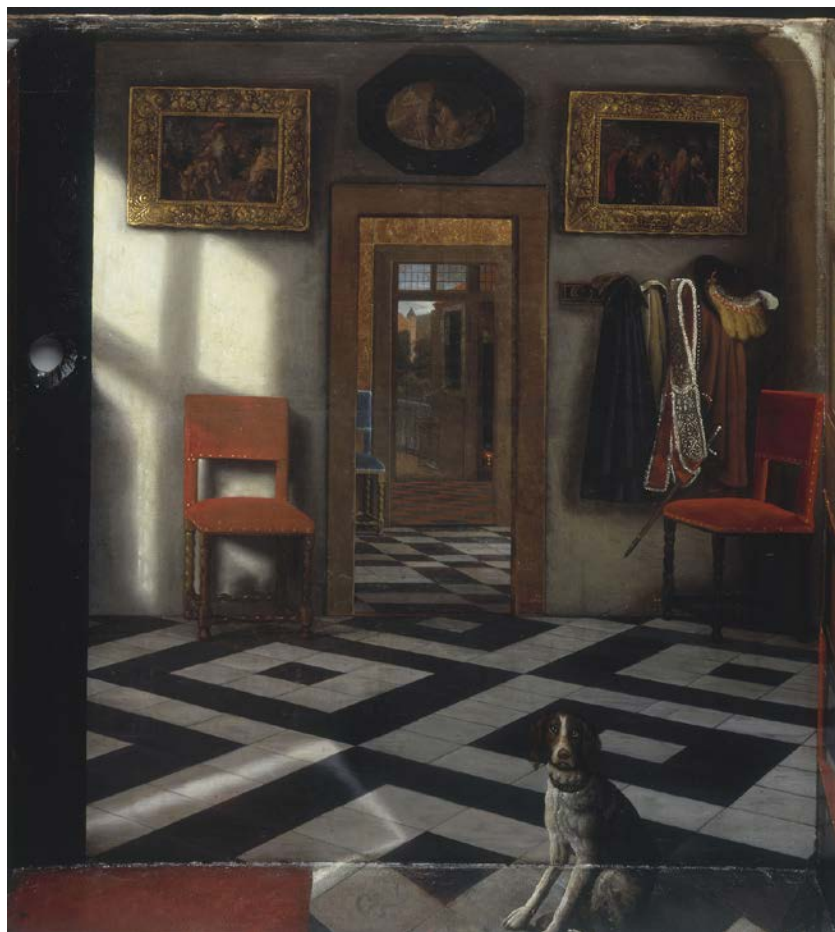


Plate 3. Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Peepshow, interior with dog and aperture* (1655–60).

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Plate 4. Jan Vermeer, *Head of a Young Woman with a Pearl Earring* (c. 1665).  
Mauritshuis, The Hague. Photo courtesy of the Mauritshuis.

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Plate 5. Samuel van Hoogstraten, *The Slippers* (1654–52). Louvre, Paris.

Photo: Erick Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

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Plate 6. Raphael, *Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione* (c. 1514–15). Louvre, Paris.

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Plate 7. Giorgio Vasari, *Portrait of Lorenzo de' Medici* (1534). Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

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Plate 8. Claude-Joseph Vernet, *The Abundant Spring* (1766). Private collection;  
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the terms under which spectators may exercise their right of judgment as a function of the price of the seats they occupy, the contract goes on to draw up the conditions under which they may also interpret it:

[I]t is finally agreed, by the foresaid Hearers and Spectators, that they neither in themselves conceal, nor suffer by them to be concealed, any state-cipherer, or politic picklock of the scene, so solemnly ridiculous, as to search out, who was meant by the gingerbread-woman, who by the hobby-horse-man, who by the costard-monger, nay, who by their wares. Or that will pretend to affirm (on his own inspired ignorance) what *Mirroure for Magistrates* is meant by the Justice, what great lady by the pig-woman, what concealed statesman, by the seller of mousetraps, and so of the rest. (Induction 119–28)

The function of front matter is of course to control how readers and spectators will take the work it presents. It is meant to guide, but also to limit, what the author regards as licit, just, or equitable applications.<sup>47</sup> Jonson is clearly anxious to ward off one kind of application in particular: interpretations keyed to contemporary politics. And, if truth be told, he had good grounds for worry. Ever since at least Shakespeare's *Richard II* of 1595, a historical tragedy whose espousal by the Essex faction at the Elizabethan court seemed a concerted effort to undermine the queen's legitimacy by associating her with Shakespeare's notoriously effeminate and self-deposing tyrant, English theatre was fraught with political tension and peril.<sup>48</sup> Nothing is easier, then or now, than to detect just the sorts of seditious topical intimations Jonson urges the public to avoid. The problem though, then as now, is that there is in fact no way to rule out the kind of mis- or over-readings Jonson dreads. People just will read as they read, especially at a time when, as in early seventeenth-century London, so much conflict, suspicion, and uncertainty was in the air.

Playing a classic triangulation game, an attempt to unite two potentially competing parties by casting out a third, Jones tries to pin all the blame on Puritans. The true enemy, the one and only, is "your land's faction, scandalized at toys." But everything in period experience, and indeed in *Bartholomew Fayre* itself, shows how Jonson's strategic choice of a scapegoat cannot work. As subsequent events will prove, the real threat to the monarch is less the ever-more clamorous "sects" demanding millenarian change than the money-men whose stranglehold on the future is confirmed by the market Jonson stages and the transformative energies it unleashes. In the absence of the theoretical and, above all, economic modes of thought writers like John Locke, William Pettis, and the amoral paradoxicalist Mandeville would elaborate decades later, people were reduced to groping for the concepts they needed to make sense of what was happening to

them. The fact remains that anyone capable of any kind of consecutive thought – which, if the contemporary observer Ludovico Zuccolo is to be believed, was in fact everyone, from courtiers and state ministers to barbers, day-labourers, and fishwives<sup>49</sup> – was acutely aware that drastic change was in the wind.

The exact form change eventually took in the English Civil Wars, the trial and decapitation of James's son Charles I, and the ceaseless parliamentary bickering and army mutinies that legitimized Oliver Cromwell's dictatorial Protectorate might conceivably have been different. Had James been more resolute and consistent, had Charles resisted the temptation to insist on his absolutist right to rule by divine sanction, had parliamentarians been able to draw a clearer separation between national needs and the *ignis fatuus* of the Biblical Fifth Monarchy, and had moneymen been less rapacious and bloody-minded, events might have taken some other course. Change was nevertheless bound to happen because change was already happening in people's minds as well as in the world about which they laboured to make them up.

There was then no way to control what readers and spectators would make of Jonson's play; and what made the attempt impossible was the market whose invisible hand guided all concerned as tyrannically as the motion-man's directs the actions of the puppets in his charge. Or so it could all too easily seem when the paradigm against which we measure literary, social, or political events is of the absolutist kind Jonson's overdetermined classical and royalist traditionalism recommends.

We will, in the next chapter, take up the case of the French dramatic poet Pierre Corneille, a writer who, like Jonson, had a social axe to grind. Following the energetic literary polemics touched off by his first indisputable popular success, the tragicomic *Le Cid* of 1637, Corneille makes mocking reference to those adversaries who deprecated his humble social origins as a country bumpkin of sorts, raised far from the capital in the provincial city of Rouen.<sup>50</sup> Corneille insinuates in reply that, for all he follows the promptings of a mere "provincial muse," he has at least managed to retain the proud independence that his Parisian rivals have sacrificed in dancing attendance on their patron, Cardinal Richelieu. It is true, he allows, that he has learned more in a few hours watching the cardinal's face than he has in years of lonely scholarly toil back in his native city. And yet the lessons personal acquaintance with Richelieu teaches have less to do with what deep study of the ancients imparts than with what arbitrarily pleases or displeases the great man, right or wrong. Corneille asks therefore to be forgiven for remaining true to his private inspiration, free from the demand to conform to the cardinal's imperious tastes.

Corneille's ultimate answer to his critics will take the form of carefully revised and closely annotated editions of his theatrical works, complete with



three formal discourses on the foundations of dramatic art and introductory essays to each of his plays, explaining what he intended, where he succeeded, and where he concedes he may have gone astray – the first edition appearing in 1660, followed two decades later by the definitive text of 1682. As Timothy Murray points out in a useful book whose Channel-hopping interests have denied it the attention it deserves, Corneille's enterprise finds an exact counterpart in Jonson's.<sup>51</sup> For Jonson too prepared authoritative editions of his work, beginning with the folio of 1616, complete with notes guiding readers through the thickets of his classical sources. What both writers have in common is the desire to reconstitute themselves as authors, worthy of the admiring posterity their classical forebears enjoy. In the process, both helped shape the pattern of modern authorship in general by transforming themselves into figures at once embattled and transcendent, historical and sublime, in which later generations of poets would find the model for the literary identities they would claim for themselves in turn.

What strikes me as most remarkable is the degree to which the ambition Jonson and Corneille share, an ambition, moreover, that their contemporaries contested even as they embraced the model it laid down, is conditioned by what at first glance looks like its antithesis: the commodification that the triumphant market imposed on their work by giving it the shape of books offered for public sale. The books each produced were, to be sure, monumental, taking the form of expensive folios beyond the reach of any but the most well-heeled readership. But their work remained an article for sale just the same, whose proceeds only fitfully reached the pockets of the poets who wrote them.<sup>52</sup> Yet what the market takes away it often gives back, as in the case of the posthumous Shakespeare first folio of 1623. For unlike Jonson or Corneille, Shakespeare seems to have given little if any thought to posterity, retiring quietly to his provincial home in Stratford-on-Avon. Yet the first folio granted an afterlife that, for all the criticisms he made of Shakespeare's work, even Jonson had to acknowledge.

The point I am trying to make is this. The capitalistic alienation we have fallen in the habit of hyperventilating about the moment markets come up is only one facet of a far more complicated story, not least because, in a play like *Bartholomew Fayre*, the private writer proves capable not only of detecting its operations but of turning them to account. For all that its global function may be, as we like to say, "subject-less," the market is not wholly or purely impersonal, and so dehumanizing. It was indeed for this very reason that Smith insisted both on its immense creative power and on the need to regulate it to correct for the larcenous forces its free operation tended to unleash. Far then from being the inhuman machine of the post-Marxist imaginary, the market is a communal space in which persons meet and redefine each other, for the most part to

benign effect. Sometimes it does so in the manner of an immense particle accelerator, where exotic entities leap into existence only to vanish a nanosecond later. But sometimes it operates like the crucible of natural selection in which new life-forms spring into being, and thrive.

As enacted in a play like *Bartholomew Fayre*, the latter metaphor feels far more appropriate. If nothing else, the market gives us London and the forms of life that city made possible. And along with the distinctive new forms of life the city created came the persons who both lived and expressed them – people like Overdo and Quarlous, Littlewit and Grace Wellborn, the Puritan Busy, the pig-woman Ursula, and the motion-man Lanthorn Leatherhead. True, in Jonson's versions of them, these persons are fictions in both the poetic and legal senses of the term. They are moreover endemic to the precise moment in the city's historical career during which they were imagined and formed. And yet they are not only endowed with characters, interests, activities, and modes of speech that produce the reality effect on which city comedy trades. They are also animated by what looks for all the world like genuine autonomy. They are in fact agents, creatures possessed of what Vincent Descombes calls the power "*d'agir de soi-même*"<sup>53</sup> – the power of acting both on their own behalf and on their own initiative even if the social or, as in Jonson's play, the dramatic basis for that power is initially delegation.

Like the intelligencers who lead him astray, Overdo is an agent of justice, the sovereign, and the commonwealth in whose name he intervenes in the activities of the fair. But the agency assigned him is also his own, a right that entitles as well as enjoins him to act in the way he does. This is, to be sure, an illusion, but an illusion whose mere possibility shows it to be something more than that even if this something more is an artefact of the authorial invention that makes him go.

## Chapter Five

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# Actor, Act, and Action: The Poetics of Agency in Corneille, Racine, and Molière

We noted in the preceding chapter the outsize role played in early modern literary studies by the thought of the Weimar-era German jurist, Carl Schmitt. Of particular interest is the importance granted Schmitt's picture of the sovereign as "he who decides on the exception" and the related notion of "political theology" of which that picture is both a signal instance and the source of much of its dark energy. And indeed, especially when set beside the period concept of the King's Two Bodies as reconstructed by Ernst Kantorowicz, the relevance of Schmitt's theses to early modern political culture seems obvious.

The early modern absolutist theory of autocratic rule that Schmitt remobilized in response to the catastrophic political paralysis of the Weimar years drew on the king's status as a *persona mixta* to explain how a mere mortal man could govern with the untrammelled authority of God's surrogate. True, as we have seen, the theory was grounded in the evidentiary and so, in the capacious period use of the term, experimental contingencies of practical affairs. As elaborated by English jurists during the reign of Elizabeth I, the theory of the King's Two Bodies was coloured by its proximal occasion in the need to solve the fiscal puzzle of distinguishing between the queen's alienable and inalienable possessions – between those holdings she was free to use, sell, or otherwise convey away by right of private ownership and those that reverted to her in her public identity as steward of a common good that belonged to the Crown itself. It is equally true that, as Kantorowicz everywhere hints, and as Thomas Hobbes's critique of the authority he believed the members of the Royal Society had arrogated to themselves in adjudicating experimental matters of fact further suggests,<sup>1</sup> the legal fiction that determined royal right also determined that of the judges who passed sentence on it. The legality of the monarch's extra-legal character as the sovereign empowered to "decide on the exception" was pronounced not by monarchs themselves but by the judges who found that that

character belonged to them. The right of decision on the sovereign's extra-legal right to decide tacitly extended to the jurists alone entitled to find and grant it.

The concept of the King's Two Bodies did nevertheless provide the framework for arguing the king's peculiar ontological privilege as being something more and other than a private person. As Jean-Marie Apostolides classically claimed in the context of the ideology sustaining the personal reign of the French king, Louis XIV, the prince was a "sacrificial" figure, one who in some sense died in his private person in mounting the throne.<sup>2</sup> This thesis received vivid expression on the English side of the Channel in *Eikon Basilike*, a royalist "image" or "likeness" of the king that circulated throughout Western Europe following the decapitation of Charles I in January 1649. Purporting to present Charles's private prayers and meditations on the eve of his execution, the *Eikon* depicts him as a Christ-like personage voluntarily suffering martyrdom on behalf of his misguided subjects, whose sins he hoped his death would ransom. As we saw in [chapter 4](#), the royal sacrifice of private identity is also a theme of the prologue to Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fayre*, addressed neither to the king in his private person nor even to the king in his public identity but rather to "the King's Majesty" as such, independent of the royal person in either of its corporeal manifestations. Nor was Jonson alone in making this move. The German baroque dramatist Andreas Gryphius deployed it to comparable effect in a tragedy that a reading of the *Eikon* inspired, *Carolus Stuardus, oder ermordete Majestät* (1657; revised in 1663). The play's title could not speak more plainly. In murdering their lawful sovereign, the English murdered Majesty itself, bringing on the ruin announced by the ghosts who haunt the guilty regicides as vengeful emanations of their own political unconscious.<sup>3</sup>

We have then ample grounds for taking Schmitt's ideas seriously even if he himself was notably indifferent to the attendant picture of princely sacrifice. And yet the application of Schmitt's model comes at significant cost: a cost linked to the work of the writer more responsible than any other for the prestige Schmitt has come to enjoy among early modernists, the Walter Benjamin of the *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, misleadingly if unavoidably known in English as *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*.<sup>4</sup> Schmitt's centrality to much of the most valuable recent work in early modern English literature in particular visibly stems from Benjamin's book. More specifically, Schmitt's relevance is deeply implicated in Benjamin's insistence on early modern *Trauer*.

Benjamin took the condition of sorrow or mourning the term *Trauerspiel* betokens to be the constitutive "subject" of the German baroque. In the punning spirit whose abuses we described in the introduction, *Trauer* has a dual character as the presiding theme of German baroque tragedy and as the mode of conscious life of which that theme is at once a symptom and emblem. As

Benjamin sees it, the *Trauerspiel* was the historical expression of the two great, cataclysmic transformations that overtook German-speaking lands in the seventeenth century, both of them direct consequences of the Thirty Years War of 1618–48. First was the utter defeat of the project of national unity pursued by the Holy Roman Empire of the Catholic Hapsburgs, a defeat sealed with the creation of the deliberately secular system of modern European nation states in the Treaty of Westphalia that brought the Thirty Years War to an end. The second was the related triumph of what, loosely following Max Weber, whose target was in fact the Calvinist contribution to the emergent “spirit” of modern capitalism, Benjamin describes as the demoralized Lutheran picture of the human creature bereft of the immanent experience of the divine he presumes to have been a birthright of the Catholic Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup>

Though Benjamin does not put the matter so bluntly, he clearly believed that the engine of the modern world at least as Germans experienced it was the confluence of the Lutheran doctrine of predestination and the equally Lutheran theory of the Two Kingdoms: the celestial one to which Christ ascended at the resurrection, never to return until a messianic end time nowhere in sight, and the earthly one dominated by material forces as tyrannical as they are blind. *Trauerspiel* is accordingly an expression not only of *Trauer*, the state of mourning that arises from the titanic metaphysical loss endemic to Western modernity, but also of *Spiel*, the German word for play that has the same semantic versatility as its English counterpart. The condition of melancholy Weberian disenchantment that *Trauerspiel* inscribes is not only enacted in German baroque tragedies as the content of the bloody events they represent. It also gives new urgency to the metaphor of the “world as a stage” in its most bleakly reductive implication. Human existence, and the transcendental values that are supposed to give it shape and meaning, are mere illusions destined to destruction. Worse, human beings are condemned to suffer and die as helpless playthings of a fate whose senselessness is deepened by its pure creaturely historicalness. No providence rules the world, only the pointless emergencies of material conflict, need, and pain.

It is intriguing to note in this connection that, in performing the “immanent critique” by which the *Trauerspiel* is shown to accomplish its own ideological destruction, making itself the ruin to which history consigns it, Benjamin turns to an analogy Jonson draws. Far from being the real human beings they vainly imagine themselves to be, the characters of German baroque tragedy are mere puppets, jerked about on strings by an invisible hand whose identity and purpose remain entirely inscrutable to them.<sup>6</sup> Citation of this Benjaminian parallel would thus seem to license a dark reading of Jonson’s puppet show. For, as we have seen, the show mimics the process of irresistible metamorphosis that

Jonson's play as a whole identifies with the market at which it takes place. The grotesquely comic mutations that overtake the puppet show's classical sources when transposed from ancient Greece to modern London constitute a *mise-en-abyme* of the play at large. They reproduce in miniature the anarchic reconfiguration of both social and personal identities and relationships that the new market economy brings about by reducing people and things to bare cash value.

However, the comparison between Benjamin's and Jonson's deployment of the puppet-show motif already indicates the costly one-sidedness of the *Origin's* argument, and so of the influence it exerts on early modern studies. Like the nearly contemporary puppet-show episode in Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1615), where the hero draws his sword to rescue a puppet lady from puppet ravishers,<sup>7</sup> Jonson's scene is funny as well as probing, making us laugh even as it raises questions of real moral, social, and political moment. Further, Jonson's mobilization of the puppet metaphor incorporates an entirely different, more openly experimental, and so more accurate picture of what early modern persons were. What Benjamin and, following his example, his early-modernist epigones see as the radical dispossession that modern disenchantment brings in its wake is directly countered by the experiment Jonson performs. It is not just that, where the bloody spectacles on which Benjamin feasts invariably end in violent death, Jonson's characters learn life lessons that enable them to change and carry on. A core feature of Jonson's characters that the experiment reveals is just the capacity to learn such lessons; and what grants them this power is the experimental nature of the multidimensional persons they discover themselves to be.<sup>8</sup>

Two points call for notice. One concerns the experimental nature of play in early modern theatre. Plays, for early moderns, were not just entertainments in the form of theatrical representations, though they were certainly that. They were also experiments. What made this possible was precisely the fact of play itself. Segments of playacting offered in sport, their fictional character permitted players, playwrights, and playgoers alike the chance to experiment with ideas, deeds, and events that, encountered in deadly earnest, might well have brought real ruin on their heads. This in turn enabled them to test notions, personality types, and modes of socio-political as well as personal association in ways that the direct experience of everyday life made it dangerous to tinker with, even in jest.<sup>9</sup> And we will in fact meet clear examples of theatre's experimental power throughout this chapter, most vividly in the last, Molière's *Versailles Impromptu* of 1663, where the spirit of experimental play receives the added emphasis of direct vocal and physical mimicry specifically designed to force out otherwise untouchable social and professional truths.



The second point concerns the light that playacting sheds on the phenomenon of person. It is telling that there are no persons in Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*. There are only roles, allegorically inflected identities that drain their bearers of anything like genuine individuality. We see the consequences in an otherwise valuable book by Julia Reinhard Lupton, where she confines the characters of the plays she reads to one of two commanding ideological functions: that of the "saints" who challenge the putatively inhuman (because secular) status quo and that of the "citizens" who are the largely anonymous beneficiaries of the sacrifice the "saints" undertake.<sup>10</sup> In Benjamin the main characters are reduced to three one-dimensional types: the tyrant whose creaturely indecisiveness leads to a violent end; the martyr the tyrant tortures and kills as a victim to his self-defeating bestial passions; and the *Intrigant*, the conspiratorial malcontent who choreographs the events that bring tyrant and martyr to their murderous tête-à-tête.<sup>11</sup>

Benjamin is right in many ways about his German corpus. A distinctive feature of *Trauerspiel* is its dramaturgical leaden-footedness. Though readers may derive great pleasure from the German plays, it is of a decidedly perverse, antiquarian kind. For instance, in Daniel Casper von Lohenstein's *Sophonisbe* (1680), when the author wants to explore the inner crisis the title character undergoes, he does not compose a soliloquy of the sort William Shakespeare or Pierre Corneille made part of their stock in trade. He mounts instead a choric interlude, a passage of song and dance between acts in which his heroine's personified Soul presides over a debate between the personified passions of Doubt, Love, Revenge, Hate, Joy, Desire, Terror, Envy, and Fear that vie for supremacy.<sup>12</sup> Lohenstein's English, French, and Spanish counterparts discover the means of personalizing the issues engaged by giving conflict the form of direct private experience. By contrast, Lohenstein depersonalizes them, turning them into the emblems Benjamin relished in large part precisely because they bleed all life from the persons and things they portray.<sup>13</sup>

The major point here, though, is this: the reduction of person to role is a specifically non- and even anti-theatrical occurrence. It may well be that, as Benjamin argues, the literary and dramatic culture of post-Westphalian Germany was incapable of anything better, and for the social and political as well as artistic reasons he alleges. Such was not however the case elsewhere in seventeenth-century Europe. The application of Benjamin's paradigm to other traditions is thus hazardous at best, not least because it obscures theatre's special contribution to the evolution of the experimental sense of person that is our theme. The question this chapter addresses is accordingly this. What was there in seventeenth-century theatre as practiced everywhere else in Western Europe

that enabled it to escape the trap into which German playwrights seem to have fallen? The answer lies in the poetics of the act, the self-determined – or at any rate apparently self-determined – deeds characters perform, and the role their status as persons plays in allowing them to do so.

A central feature of the act is the peculiar relation it entertains with the encompassing action of which it is part. And a central feature of the action in turn is the teleological recursiveness by which, once the final curtain drops, we discover that the autonomous acts of which it has been constructed are not as autonomous as they seem. What is true of the acts characters undertake is equally true of whatever moral, social, or political end their acts are shown to bring about. The agency Jonson grants the invisible hand of the market in *Bartholomew Fayre* is after all a fiction. The agency the play ultimately asserts, the “soul” that animates the “body” of the dramatic spectacle, is Jonson’s own. We see this not only in the financial as well as cultural stake he had in claiming a novel social identity for himself as a dramatic author. We see it above all in the finalist perspective whose emergence in the denouement imposes a plot-like unity on the chaotic proliferation of sub-plots a day at the fair occasions. And indeed, if the case the play makes for the finally benevolent operations of the market feels convincing, it is precisely because, as the puppet-show *mise-en-abyeme* reminds us, there is in fact a governing hand at work – the hand of the poet who composed the script the players obediently rehearse.

Like the modern stage whose fundamental pattern the period laid down as firmly as it did that of modern experimental science, seventeenth-century theatre is built on a central paradox one of whose most characteristic outgrowths is the problem of free will, the term early moderns used to define what we would now call agency. And it is just here that we meet theatre’s contribution to the early modern picture of person – a picture whose experimental nature points the way out of the trap Benjamin finds in the German baroque. For, as we have seen in a variety of lights throughout the book so far, a hallmark of early modern experiment is the contingency that makes it at once useful and expendable. Experiment changes things if only by helping us discover facts or truths we did not know before. But, in changing things, experiment also sets us free in a way the ontological puzzles that continue to bedevil the classic problem of free will conceal.

## 1. Actor, Act, and Action in Benjamin’s French Baroque

Given the criticisms I have just voiced about his work, it will doubtless come as a surprise that the first step along the path just outlined should involve a return to Benjamin’s theory of the German baroque. I take this step because, even as

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the metaphysical trap he laid for himself slammed shut, Benjamin cast his eye beyond his immediate historical corpus in a way that suggests he had an inkling that something was amiss.<sup>14</sup>

In a letter to his friend, the Austrian poet and playwright Hugo von Hofmannsthal, written while he was struggling to complete the *Habilitationsschrift* version of the *Trauerspiel* book, Benjamin makes an intriguing confession. “I sometimes think of writing a book on French tragedy as a counterpart to my *Trauerspiel* book. My plan for the latter had originally been to elucidate both the German and the French *Trauerspiel* in terms of their contrastive nature.” But he goes on to concede that “something must be added,” and the project came to naught.<sup>15</sup>

What intrigues me here is the unspecified addition Benjamin would have had to make to include the French case in the *Trauerspiel* book. I have discussed in another place what I think Benjamin ought to have added – the perspective of comedy his symptomatic preoccupation with tragedy ruled out.<sup>16</sup> I focus here, less polemically, on what I believe he would in fact have added, and why and how he would have got matters wrong – albeit in a way that steers us right.

To this end, I will among other things try to scratch an itch that has tormented scholars of the so-called French classical age for half a century and more: the question of the French baroque. Ever since the publication of Jean Rousset’s *The Literature of the Baroque Age in France* in 1953, a lively debate has grown up around what the majority of French critics and historians still regard as the fundamentally classical character of seventeenth-century French culture, especially as manifest during its apogee during the reign of Louis XIV.<sup>17</sup> Like many terminological debates, this one exaggerates the stakes involved in choosing one word over the other. As we saw in [chapter 2](#), with reference to the Reformed Dutch contribution to the European baroque, the crucial issue is less how we characterize the formal elements of baroque thought, expression, and style than the underlying historical experience of which those elements are symptoms. And the key to diagnosing that experience lies in the pan-European contest that pitted the idealistic transcendentalisms inherited from the medieval and Renaissance past against the grinding social, economic, and political realities that eventually wore them down.

Baroque in the narrow, stylistic sense is then the name we give both to a particular set of intellectual and artistic responses and to their role as historical telltales that engaged in often direct polemical dialogue with others – among them, those features of form, expression, and style cultivated in Ludovican France to which French scholars have affixed the name classical. Which is to say that, properly classical or not, the non- or anti-baroque features of seventeenth-century French theatre, for example, were, from a wider historical point

of view, as deeply entangled in the core dialectical struggle that defines the era as their more obviously baroque opposites.<sup>18</sup> Thus, though the differences between how French, Spanish, or German players and playwrights did theatre are not negligible, the problem is one of contrasting nuances that could, and did, constitute shifting reactions to the same underlying cultural condition. Just as the counter-baroque realism of Dutch Golden Age painting can be seen as how Dutch painters did the baroque in their own antithetical way, so too the reputed classicism of French theatre of the *grand siècle* can be interpreted as a specifically French attempt to come to terms with the demoralizing struggles for which other nations devised baroque solutions.

The question of nuance already illuminates Benjamin's problem. For the key to what he failed to understand about French classical tragedy turns out to be related to what induces him to see it as being in fact baroque, and therefore, as he explicitly puts it to Hofmannsthal, just another instance of *Trauerspiel*. Conversely, in working out what Benjamin would have misunderstood in thinking of French tragedy as *Trauerspiel*, we will get an insight into what French scholars frequently miss about their own tradition in insisting that it was what they call classical, and so anything but baroque. And all of this will in turn enable us to see what both sides in the dispute fail to grasp: the key role played in seventeenth-century theatre as a whole by the perspective of experimental comedy I have for the moment set aside.

In its character as an addition significant enough to warrant an entirely new book, Benjamin's interpretation of seventeenth-century French tragedy would have disarranged the constellation of ideas that structures the *Origin of German Tragic Drama* as we know it. After all, he managed to incorporate the cases of England and Spain in the *Trauerspiel* book in a way that, far from challenging his take on the German case, confirmed it at every point. For example, Benjamin writes tellingly about the "sophistical solutions" that enabled the Spanish poet-priest Pedro Calderón de la Barca to bridge the ontological abyss between Luther's two kingdoms, creaturely existence and the radiant eternity that awaits us in the world to come – a task that defeated the melancholy German Lutherans on whom he concentrated attention.<sup>19</sup> A man of the theatre to a degree the earnestly bookish Gryphius, Lohenstein, or Johann Christian Hallmann were not, Calderón mobilizes the trompe-l'œil machinery of the stage to elevate the illusion of earthly life that theatre purveys to the still greater illusion of transcendence whose deeply felt impossibility motivates him as much as his German counterparts.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Shakespeare is sharply distinguished from Benjamin's Germans for creating, in his soliloquies, vivid explorations of the psychic ontology of the primal fall that the metaphor-clogged set-piece declamations of the German stage failed to achieve. Still, the greatness of the Englishman's *Hamlet*

(1603) is said to lie in having epitomized the vision of the human condition in which *Trauerspiel* takes root.<sup>21</sup> So if something more was needed in the French case, it is because French tragedy posed special difficulties that Benjamin could not solve within the extant *Origin's* framework.

Key to the problematic addition is the contrast between French and German *Trauerspiel* to which he alludes. For Benjamin, German tragic drama not only happens to be baroque; it is quintessentially so. His conviction on this score is all the more salient in that, far from arguing the point, he takes it entirely for granted. Further, as Jane Newman documents in rich detail, the fact that it is baroque is not just a matter of the peculiar form it takes as an expression of the contingent historical moment to which it belongs. What makes it baroque also makes it German, revealing the specifically national experience of post-Westphalian modernity with which German scholars of the Weimar Republic associated the baroque as constituting the uniquely German equivalent of the Italian Renaissance. The *Origin's* implicit aim is accordingly to define modern German culture as a whole – a task the more urgent in the wake of Germany's humiliating defeat in the Great War.<sup>22</sup>

The prospect drastically changes, however, the moment we cross the Rhine. For French scholars of the 1920s and 1930s, and often still today, the French seventeenth century was as incontrovertibly classical as the German was baroque. Nor is it simply that, in contrast to what we arguably observe everywhere else in Europe, French poets were guided by classical standards of reason and taste their conceit-drunk foreign contemporaries neglected. The *grand siècle* achieved a self-disciplined urbanity in whose ironic light the baroque emerged as the deformed monstrosity that inspired later neoclassicists to coin the term *barocco* in the first place.<sup>23</sup>

Benjamin could have found ready examples of the baroque in the French classical age, and in particular in the earlier seventeenth century of Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu. Ever since Rousset raised the issue in his *Literature of the Baroque Age in France*, even diehard defenders of the centrality of French classicism acknowledge the baroque-ness of Alexandre Hardy, Théophile de Viau, Tristan l'Hermite, or Jean Rotrou – dramatists whose tragedies resemble German poets' far more closely than those of the *grands classiques*, Corneille and Jean Racine.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, just as Benjamin retains only Shakespeare and Calderón, overlooking the more congenially misshapen productions of John Webster, Thomas Middleton, and John Ford or of Félix Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, and Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, he would have dwelt above all on the *grands classiques* as such. And a major reason for doing so is that the French scholars he consulted did so. If the circumstances of German history from the Reformation to the Great War persuaded German literary historians to identify

the national spirit born with the Treaty of Westphalia as baroque, it was integral to French scholars' perception of their own national identity to insist on its classical character.<sup>25</sup>

In stressing the contrast between the cases of seventeenth-century Germany and France, Benjamin's target would then have been the myth of French cultural exceptionalism that classicism sustains. Our question is thus how to read the classicism responsible for French exceptionalism, illuminating in the process the specifically French experience of post-Westphalian modernity. And Benjamin's chief exemplars would have been Corneille and his younger epigone and rival, Racine.

Moreover, since the evidence suggests that this second book would have extended rather than confuted the first, Benjamin's goal would have been to show how the exception proves the rule, ceasing to be an exception at all. The theme would accordingly have been a paradox in which we discern a Benjaminian version of postwar German revanchism. Though its significance stems from German efforts to define a cultural identity worthy of the political one Otto von Bismarck had forged, the experience of defeat in 1918 made the baroque the order of the day in Weimar Germany. But, as Benjamin saw it, the experience of defeat defined the uniquely German insight into the nature of Western modernity. The point he would have argued about the *grand siècle* would thus have been to show that what made France different also made it the same: a participant in the disenchanted modernity shared with the German enemy.

What has always seemed to distinguish French classical tragedy both from predecessors in the French tradition and from unruly counterparts in the rest of Europe is the perfection of the scenic illusion achieved through the famous unities and the closely related mastery of dramatic *vraisemblance* or verisimilitude.<sup>26</sup> The prime directive of classical drama was to fuse the space-time of performance with that of the world it represents; and this fusion flowed from the principle of immanence informing the Aristotelian demand for the strict internal necessity of the encompassing plot. Where diegetic modes of representation in history or romance rely on mediating narrative to describe the events out of which a plot is formed, theatrical mimesis embodies events themselves. The consequence from the standpoint of dramatic poetics is the need to ensure that the knowledge readers and spectators need to understand why characters act and talk the way they do arises as a spontaneous outgrowth of the situations in which the actors find themselves.

The chief function of French classicism is then to regularize the kind of "sophistic" solutions with which Benjamin credits Calderón. Corneille's case proves especially telling here. Like Calderón, he was a committed transcendentalist who shared the Spaniard's Jesuit-inspired faith in the redemptive



power of the human will.<sup>27</sup> The Augustinian picture of postlapsarian corruption that mesmerized all Christian believers from the Reformation on portrays human beings as denied direct access to the efficacious grace alone capable of redeeming our sins. Even in religious dramas, God's intention is perceived as a rigorously natural function of the human actions theatre represents. In Corneille's *Polyeucte*, first staged in 1643, the proof of God's providential presence in the sublunary world is the death the eponymous hero willingly embraces for his sake, seconded by his wife Pauline's conversion on witnessing Polyeucte's martyrdom. And lest we miss the point, the imperial deputy Sévère, Polyeucte's initially lucky rival for Pauline's love, draws the lesson by acknowledging a spiritual power he admires even if he cannot grasp it. The theoretical result is the *vraisemblance extraordinaire* Corneille loftily opposes to the more worldly kind he associates with his competitors, Jean Mairet, Georges de Scudéry, or Rotrou.<sup>28</sup> Yet the fact that the effects he achieves are "extraordinary" in no way diminishes their underlying verisimilitude. If readers and spectators suspend their disbelief in the way the play means them to, it is because the action naturalizes the triumphant self-overcoming sealed by the hero's death.

This is where Benjamin would have set to work. What made Corneille classical in the eyes of the French commentators of Benjamin's day is what enables the sophisticated Calderón of *Life Is a Dream* (c. 1635) to incarnate the baroque dramaturgy his melancholy German contemporaries aspired to. As in *Polyeucte*, vindication of God's providence takes the form of the hero Segismundo's spontaneous embrace of the theological idea encapsulated in the play's title. For all the unfolding story's pressing immediacy, human life is a dream; and if the audience endorses this sentiment at the final curtain, it is because, a fiction that has kept them on the edge of their seats throughout, the play itself is a dream in which we believe as firmly as in the creaturely life it mimics. The classicism scholars took to distinguish Corneille from his German counterparts is the fruit of the dramatic sophistry of which Gryphius, Hallmann, and Lohenstein were incapable.

Benjamin would thus have aimed at the anamorphic reversal by which what appears to set French tragedy apart from German *Trauerspiel* turns out to be the metaphysical condition it shares with it; and the entry point for this demonstration would have been French management of dramatic action. More specifically, it would have been the relation between the dramatic action and its basic unit of measurement and construction: the individual act and its insertion in the self-organizing action it serves. If acts supply the building blocks out of which an action is composed, the action in turn necessitates those acts as an expression of the overarching logic they articulate. The key to solving the

riddle of French exceptionalism is thus the self-governing dialectic binding act to action, and action to act.

However, the outcome of Benjamin's interpretation of the paradoxical affinity uniting *tragédie classique* and *Trauerspiel* produces a further paradox. Though the apparent French exception turns out to be no exception at all, the playwright who exhibits the strongest contrast with the German baroque is the baroque Corneille. And he is cast in this light by the theology of the act on which his dramatic sophistry depends. The premise that defines the distinctive features of Cornelian action, producing the hyperbolic excess of the *vraiesemblance extraordinaire* that makes it baroque, is the power to act – a power the plot sets in tension with the world in which the act takes place. Conversely, the playwright who proves least resistant to the German baroque theology of the fall is the supremely classical Racine. It is not just that, unlike their Cornelian counterparts who not only act but do so as a spontaneous answer to the higher call of love, faith, or duty that defines them, Racinian characters typically hesitate in the manner Benjamin prescribes, driven helplessly about by the storm winds of desire, hate, and ambition. Once Racine's heroes and heroines do resolve themselves to act, the result is their crushing subjection to the state of affairs from which they struggle to escape.

Benjamin's book on seventeenth-century French tragedy might have restated another item found in the critical literature he would have consulted. As the French tradition has argued ever since Jean de La Bruyère first floated the idea in his *Characters, or the Mores of This Age* (1688, with revisions down to 1694), what grants Cornelian heroes and heroines the world-beating self-determination denied their Racinian peers is the fact that, where the latter portray humanity as it is, the former represent it as it should be:

Corneille subjugates us to his characters and ideas, Racine conforms to ours; the former paints men as they should be, the latter paints them as they are. There is more in the first of what we admire, and of what we even ought to imitate; there is more in the second of what we recognize in others, and experience in ourselves. The one elevates, astounds, overmasters, instructs; the other pleases, stirs, touches, penetrates. What is handsome, noble, and imperious in reason is handled by the first; and by the other, what is most moving and delicate in our passions.<sup>29</sup>

The key lies in the divergent anthropologies and the related theologies of the will.

Benjamin's book would have anticipated the work of another conflicted Eastern European materialist of a neo-Kantian stripe, Lucien Goldman's *The Hidden God*.<sup>30</sup> Thanks to the Jesuit doctrine of the will he shares with Calderón,

Corneille develops a poetics of the act. By contrast, Racine elaborates a poetics of action grounded in the crypto-Lutheran sense of the bondage of the will associated with his upbringing in the Jansenist community of Port-Royal. In line with the principle of immanence that secures the illusion of natural truth, both playwrights represent a world defined by the absence of the God who made it, engendering the evils their characters inherit from the past. But, in Corneille, this absence occasions a dramatic version of the “sufficient” grace Jesuits align with the autonomous power of will that enables the Rodrigue and Chimène of *Le Cid* (1637) to turn vengeful filial duty into pure self-determined love or that enables the Antiochus of *Rodogune* (1645) to distinguish himself from his otherwise indiscernible twin, surmounting the tragic fate to which his brother succumbs. By contrast, in Racine, the absence of the divine produces *le comble* or utmost height of tragic irony owing to which each act his characters perform hastens the fate that a malign providence reserves for them.

So what is the act that it should exist in tension with the action it advances? And what is the action if it is greater than the sum of the acts that compose it? It bears witness to the beautiful symmetry the pursuit of this Benjaminian line of inquiry brings to light that the dialectic of act and action is as integral to the contrasting poetics of our two French poets as to the metaphysical horizons described by the themes they join.

The status of the act lies at the heart of *La Place Royale, or The Extravagant Lover* (1634), last in the string of comedies leading to Corneille’s first tragedy, the *Medea* of 1635. The premise is yet a third paradox. The curtain rises on the end of a romantic comedy in which the hero Alidor is left in possession of the woman he loves, the beautiful and tough-minded Angélique. Possession of the woman also leaves Alidor in possession of the Place Royale itself, the physical space of the Parisian square (the present-day Place des Voges) that bears that name and forms the communal arena of amorous combat. For two other men love Angélique, and smart at the loss their rival’s success inflicts: the odious Doraste, to whom Angélique briefly plights her troth in resentment at Alidor’s mistreatment of her; and Alidor’s bosom friend Cléandre, who attempts to abduct the heroine towards the end of the play only to seize the wrong woman in the confusion caused by the dark of night. The trouble is that Alidor is royally bored. In his capacity as romantic lead, he always gets the girl: that is his role, and therefore his fate.<sup>31</sup> So Alidor wants his freedom and, as its outcome and condition, he wants change. And change is what he gets in that the result of the comic imbroglios the action sets in train is to break the amorous chains that bind heroine to hero.

In keeping with the extravagance promised in its subtitle, *La Place Royale* is startlingly new: a romantic comedy in which, after mighty struggle, the hero

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finally rids himself of romantic entanglement, leaving the heroine to storm off to a convent, never to set eye on men again. This inversion of the romantic norm generates the play's exceptional comic energy. Alidor is so invincibly attractive that persuading Angélique to forsake him turns out to be a Herculean task. Nor do things work out quite as he imagined. Far from setting him free by giving her hand to either of his rivals, Angélique perjures herself for Alidor's sake, reneging on her promise to marry Doraste only to discover that what she took to be Alidor's arrangements to elope with her were in fact an attempt to kidnap her on Cléandre's behalf. The upshot is not only Angélique's decision to quit the world but what looks like Alidor's reversion to the role he has desperately tried to shed:

Puisque vous me pouvez accepter sans parjure,  
 Mon âme, se peut-il que votre rigueur dure?  
 Suis-je plus Alidor? vos feux sont-ils éteints?  
 Et quand mon amour croît, produit-il vos dédains?<sup>32</sup>

[Since you can take me now without breach of faith,  
 My soul, how can your rigor persist?  
 Am I no longer Alidor? Is your ardor extinct?  
 And when my love grows, does it prompt your disdain?]

Yet however messy the process, Alidor remains in sole possession of "the place": the heroine's heart since, when we last see her, she is determined to withdraw from all commerce with men; the stage in that the play ends with a soliloquy in which he congratulates himself on his narrow escape; and the public too inasmuch as his soliloquy features a metalepsis in which he steps out of the world of the action to address all women foolish enough to fantasize about capturing his heart:

Beautés, ne pensez point à réveiller ma flamme,  
 Vos regards ne sauraient asservir ma raison,  
 Et ce sera beaucoup emporté sur mon âme  
 S'ils me font curieux d'apprendre votre nom.<sup>33</sup>

[Beauties, think not of awakening the flame of love in me,  
 Your eyes can never enslave my reason,  
 And it would already ask a great deal of my soul  
 To make me so much as curious to know your names.]

The question *La Place Royale* poses is thus whether even a hero can truly act; and the form the question takes tells us what an act is: a self-determined product of free will that, as Hannah Arendt puts it in *Between Past and Future*, changes the order of the world in which it happens.<sup>34</sup>

This generates a still further paradox. For the act Alidor wants to perform depends on the action as much as the conformity to generic type he rebels against. This is one reason for the hero's striking metalepsis. By breaking the plane of separation between actor and audience, Alidor asserts his autonomy even as he reminds us of its artificiality. But the paradox of the act's dependence on the action also explains why nothing of the kind will happen again. Dating from *Medea*, Corneille will scrupulously obey the firm classical proscription of metalepsis as a fatal breach of dramatic propriety.<sup>35</sup> And nowhere is this proscription more emphatic than in a tragedy whose testimony to our problem is underscored by the fact that its hero's name is an anagram of the period French term for actor, *comédien*.<sup>36</sup>

The avoidance of metalepsis in *Nicomède* (1651) in part reflects the title character's dignity as a tragic hero. It is a matter of social decorum as well as literary policy. It is one thing for the idle Alidor (whose name, incidentally, is an anagram for the French *ordalie*, or judicial ordeal) to put the ladies of Paris on notice of his immunity to their charms. It is quite another for a prince to mingle with the masses in this way. But *Nicomède*'s heroic dignity also expresses that of the species to which he belongs. *Nicomède* is a distinctively Cornelian creation: a son whose mission it is to teach his father Prusias how to act, affirming in the process a moral autonomy emphasized by the fact that it is he, and not his father, who knows what should be done, and does it. As a son, he has a predetermined role to play – that of paying the debt he owes the author of his days. The trouble is that the at once moral and political disorder that generates the play's plot stems from a paternal weakness as exemplary as *Nicomède*'s strength.

For Prusias is incapable of playing the part providence assigns him: that of the sovereign charged with deciding the issue of events. Indeed, compared to his boy, Prusias cuts an ignoble figure, presenting the very portrait of the feckless Benjaminian tyrant. All but comically impotent in his dealings with his vindictive second wife, who schemes to eliminate his natural successor in favour of her own son, Prusias proves equally powerless in response to the extortions of imperial Rome. Incapable of setting things right in his own house, he is reduced to pitiful wavering in the face of the Roman threat. To borrow Benjamin's wonderful metaphors, he flaps in the wind like a tattered banner, a king of playing cards or a figure out of the paintings of El Greco, distinguished by the smallness of his head.<sup>37</sup> The result plunges his kingdom into a Schmittian

state of life-and-death exception from which it is rescued only once his legitimate heir in effect usurps the throne by acting like the king his father should be.

The heroic resolve Nicomède displays in the hour of public as well as private need resolves the paradox *La Place Royale* lays out. What enables Nicomède to act, becoming the sovereign the law of royal primogeniture decrees, is his deliberate acceptance of the part the occasioning action requires him to play. On the one hand he ceases to be the mere empirical Nicomède, Prusias's boy, in order to be reborn as the hero who, in assuming the sovereign identity for which his father proves unfit, saves both father and kingdom. However, the very gesture by which he makes the exemplary sacrifice of his private person in order to play his public part shows him to be a true actor in every sense: one whose unwavering conformity to type produces the act that, in preserving his father's realm, changes the political landscape in which the play begins.

The solution of the paradox Corneille confronts is thus as sophistically baroque as anything in Calderón – but the Calderón of the cloak-and-dagger plays rather than religious allegories like *Life Is a Dream* or the *autos sacramentales*. The Segismundo of *Life Is a Dream* replaces his father on the throne when, taught by his own bizarre experience that earthly reality is an illusion, he overcomes the bestial urges to which original sin condemns all human creatures. He thus takes psychic dictation from the divine stage manager who, like his counterpart in *The Great Stage of the World* (1655), silently watches over him from the start. By contrast, Nicomède stands alone in that, in the hour of need, his sole resource is his own heroic will. Nicomède becomes a king because the test of events finds him just to be one, the proof being the resolve with which he acts when the unfolding action wheels round the moment to do so. Where his father behaves like an ordinary mortal in whom we recognize all of the hallmarks of the German baroque picture of the fallen human condition, the son not only conforms to the ideal expected of a king but actively makes it real. And he does so just because he acts where his weak-willed father vacillates.

Which brings us to the dilemma Benjamin faced in contemplating a book on French tragedy, and perhaps too a clue to the unspecified addition he confessed he would have had to make in order to bring it off. For *Nicomède* proves most baroque just when it most decisively deviates from Benjamin's model. If the point of the second book is to show how the French exception to the baroque cashes out as a disguised version of the putative European norm, and if, in Corneille, French tragedy is nowhere less baroque in Benjamin's sense than where it is most so, Benjamin would have had to find his probative example in Racine, that dramatist in whom French scholars most unarguably discern the classical ideal that sets their tradition apart.



Still, Racine's classicism raises more questions than it answers in that it was so multifariously overdetermined. One of the many seminal ideas in Roland Barthes's *On Racine* is that of the "refusal to inherit" that characterizes the species *homo racinianus*.<sup>38</sup> In the first place, the rejection of a lineal legacy pinpoints the omnipresent weight and authority of a heroic past of which the majority of his heroes and heroines are the self-consciously belated, sub-heroic legatees. For instance, the chief characters of the play Barthes had most clearly in mind in propounding his thesis, *Andromache* (1667), are all burdened by inherited identities that threaten to pre-empt the ones they attempt to forge for themselves. Pyrrhus is the son of Achilles, Orestes the son of Agamemnon, Hermione the daughter of Helen, and Andromache the widow of Hector. And if it happens that the one character in the play who does seem genuinely to act lacks a heroic parent to live up to, the title character Andromache herself, it is because she is prepared for this role by her suicidal readiness to stand in her dead husband's place, offering to give her life to secure a problematic future for a son whose fate it will be to measure up to the example his own father set.

But what is true of his heroes and heroines is also true of Racine. Racine was a belated poet whose notoriously Oedipal relation to his giant predecessor Corneille helps account for the lamentable violence engendered by the fact that, as mentioned earlier, his characters resemble human beings as they are rather than as Cornelian example shows they ought to be. From this standpoint, even Racine's oft-cited Jansenism turns out to be overdetermined.<sup>39</sup>

In line with what Blair Hoxby has recently shown to have been the pan-European norm of early modern tragic drama, tragedy did not have to end in the kind of sacrificial death that, from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Nietzsche down to Benjamin and beyond, the German Romantic tradition has taught us it had to in order to count as tragedy at all.<sup>40</sup> On the contrary, as the examples of Corneille's *Nicomède* and, despite the death of the hero's twin brother, *Rodogune* suggest, tragedies could in fact end happily. For what made tragedy, by early modern lights, was the grandeur of the characters and events it staged, coupled with the powerful emotions of pity, fear, and breathless suspense those events inspired. A play could thus take the form of what early modern theorists called a "simple pathetic tragedy" like Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, whose whole action, like that of John Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (1671) until the unlooked-for offstage deed of violence with which it ends, consists of the hero's lamentations over the *pathos* he both endures and transmits to readers and audience.

If then, in contrast to both Cornelian and general practice, Racinian classical tragedy is a thing of quite literally murderous rigour and exactness, shaping

plots whose ice-cold regularity ensures that his characters suffer the maximum of pain, it is in large measure because Racine defined himself as the relentlessly classical poet who is not the baroque Corneille. If Racine's *dramatis personae* are unable to act or, better, if the acts they perform serve only to seal the mortal fate to which the action consigns them, it is because the *place royale* of free creation was already occupied by Racine's elder Cornelian twin. Where Corneille gives us a baroque theatre of the act, Racine gives us a stringently classical theatre of Aristotelian action. Further, if, as Aristotle's *Poetics* (1449a–50b) teaches, *ethos* or character is a strict function of the underlying *praxis* or plot to whose immanent logical determinations it is bound, Racine's routine definition of character as ensnared in the toils of identities imposed by the past expresses, at the level of poetics, his own struggle to break free of his inescapable precursor.

But perhaps greater than the overdetermining fact of having to write in Corneille's shadow was the constraint Racine experienced as a poet who came of age in the reign of Louis XIV. Ever since Voltaire's history of the period in 1751, our conception of the French seventeenth century has been coloured by a pervasive obsession with Ludovican absolutism.<sup>41</sup> This notion has generated a seemingly incorrigible teleological illusion: the tendency to interpret the era as a whole in the retrospective light of the presumed classical heyday that is said to have guided it from the start. With his seizure of power from the minister Nicolas Fouquet in 1661, Louis declared the start of a personal reign whose principle informs the famous (if doubtless apocryphal) claim, "L'État, c'est moi." As a defence against a return both to the horrific civil wars of the preceding century and to the political chaos of the Frondes of 1648–52, Louis made it clear that the fate of France lay henceforth in his hands alone. The result was not only the absolutist form of the state but also the model of grandeur that state monolithically embodied in the heroic royal figure whose ceaseless praise Boileau's *Art of Poetry* (1674) identified as the one true theme of national verse.<sup>42</sup> What made the "grand siècle" *grand* was thus its late political master, Louis le Grand himself. And as Boileau's role in the business makes clear, the central literary expression of this grandeur was the kind of poetry both he and Racine asserted against baroque precursors like Corneille: the programmatically classical verse whose shaping impact French historians so readily read back into earlier decades.

Quite apart then from having to distinguish himself from the great Corneille, Racine became an exponent of the culture of moral as well as political defeat that Paul Bénichou describes in his still authoritative *Morales du Grand siècle* of 1948.<sup>43</sup> What made a poet like Racine possible was the triumphant court culture at Ludovican Versailles: a culture that, grounded in the final humiliation of the free-booting political adventurers of both the king's father's reign and the

regency that followed Louis XIII's death, made the kind of personal authority Corneille proudly asserted a thing of the past. It is thus hauntingly appropriate that the social success Racine's poetic exertions assured him should have been sealed with his appointment as the king's historiographer in 1677: an office that demanded not only constant attendance at court but forswearing the right to publish in his own name during his tenure as royal chronicler.<sup>44</sup>

But what is this disheartening vista if not exactly the kind of thing Benjamin finds in the German baroque? It even matches the terms of the crucial distinction Benjamin draws between Greek tragedy and German *Trauerspiel*. As Benjamin sees it, the ultimate fruit of Greek tragedy, in direct contrast to what we observe in *Trauerspiel*, is the dignity that human beings achieve in defiance of the fate the gods ordain. Greek tragedy is said to usher in a new order of self-determined human law paid for by the proudly sacrificial acts tragic heroes and heroines are shown to make, thereby asserting not only their independence from but their superiority to the divinities who kill them.<sup>45</sup> Were we then to look for a counterpart to Greek tragedy as Benjamin understood it in seventeenth-century France, the baroque Corneille is what we would find, for it is he who champions human autonomy in defiance of arbitrary fate. The true equivalent to Benjaminian *Trauerspiel* is the classical Racine, as subject to the Sun King's arbitrary decrees as any pre-tragic Greek.

Further, Racine's competition with Corneille and his subservience to the absolutist state even produce a match for the underlying poetics of *Trauerspiel* in the self-defeating hesitations that bedevil characters' responses to the situations in which they are thrown and the curiously comic form the action takes whenever they try to act independently. Consider from this standpoint a passage in Racine that captures the essence of the case, act 2 of *Andromache*. In conformity with the five-part scheme of French classical poetics, eschewing the three-act model of the Spanish *comedia*, act 2 introduces the dramatic complication of the initial situation presented in act 1. It accordingly develops the plot threads whose "knotting" in act 3 commits the characters to the tragic end consummated in act 5, reversing the hopes and fears generated by act 4's plot-twisting *péripiéties*.

We learn in act 1 that, despite heading up an embassy on behalf of the Greeks to demand the death of Hector's son Astyanax, an execution for which Pyrrhus is to be rewarded by marriage with Hermione, Orestes has in fact arrived on the scene to pursue his own desire for Helen's daughter, making his performance of an ambassadorial role as ambiguous as he finds it painful.<sup>46</sup> We also learn that, despite being the son of Hector's killer, Pyrrhus is in love with Andromache. He is therefore unwilling to give the Greeks what they want since to do so would end all hope of winning her hand.

Act 2, scene 1, introduces the play's first plot complication in the person of Hermione. Tirelessly stalked by Orestes, whom she loathes, she is passionately enamoured of Pyrrhus. However, when Orestes presses his suit in 2.2, she promises to marry him if Pyrrhus rejects the Greeks' demand that he surrender Andromache's boy. Having just heard from Pyrrhus's own lips that he has no intention of surrendering Hector's son, Orestes gloats in 2.3 over the certainty of getting his wish. His behaviour in this is unseemly: his soliloquy sounds like the fatuous self-gratulations in which the egregious Arnolphe of Molière's *The School for Wives* (1662) indulges in contemplating what he falsely imagines to be his foolproof plan to escape cuckoldry. Orestes' misguided rejoicing is all the more laughably misplaced in that, having witnessed Andromache's refusal to submit to Pyrrhus's blackmail in 1.4, the audience already knows that Pyrrhus has changed his mind. Orestes himself only learns the truth in 2.4, when Pyrrhus declares his intention to accept Hermione's hand. The immediate result is the irresistibly if no doubt unconsciously comic aside ("Ah dieux!") with which Orestes reels offstage. However, the *comble* of quasi-comical tragic irony comes in 2.5. Having unknowingly gone a long way towards unhinging the powers of reason that will utterly abandon Orestes at the final curtain, Pyrrhus launches into a tirade of vengeful hate for Andromache whose pathological excessiveness leads his confidant Phoenix rightly to surmise that he is in fact still in love with her.

It suffices to have summarized the action here to make my point. At the same time as Racine orchestrates the plot complications needed to tie the tragic knot, he reveals all of his characters to be Benjaminian puppets, jerked about on the hidden strings of a fate no less malignant for looking like divine design. Unlike, say, the Lohenstein of *Sophonisbe*, punning to the point of pedantry on cognates of the word *Spiel* in token of his characters' feckless fatedness, Racine plays his cards artfully close to his chest. Nevertheless, what he produces is nothing if not *Trauerspiel*.

But what is this if not confirmation of the deepest idea shaping Benjamin's hypothetical French *Origin*? What both *Trauerspiel* and Racinian tragedy denounce as fate, a notion that, for all its tragic resonance, continues to reserve a place for the providence the secular turn of post-Westphalian modernity is in the process of effacing, is in reality the determinism of history at its most lamentably profane. The Germans of Benjamin's generation knew this, having lost the Great War and endured the hunger and hyperinflation provoked by the draconian war reparations exacted in the Treaty of Versailles. By contrast, deluded by their triumph in 1918, and by their faith in the exceptional literary culture that seemed to justify that ephemeral as well as pyrrhic victory, the French would not come to see it till the Fall of France in May–June 1940. And

even then it would take the insights of the dogged French-speaking Switzer Rousset to begin to draw the lessons.

## 2. Epistemo-Critical Transition

And yet is it the case that, as in their complementary ways both Benjamin and Racine seem to hint, who says “history” says “fate”?

It is true that, as I myself have argued, one of the great achievements of seventeenth-century European literary, artistic, and philosophical culture was to have begun to see history in specifically modern terms. In place of one or another of the providential or finalist schemes inherited from both ancient letters and Judeo-Christian faith, playwrights in particular discovered in the principle of immanence implicit in their art a paradigm that enabled them to portray historical events as an entirely self-organizing process of moral, social, and political change.<sup>47</sup> And it is also true that the same philosophical tradition that gave us the post-Hegelian theory of tragedy that Hoxby challenges gave as the notion that history, properly understood, should always be written with a capital letter, as History: an invincible secular force impervious to private human intention, meaning, or will.

Immanuel Kant worked towards a picture like this in his “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent” of 1784. In contemplating what we would now call the sociometric evidence on marriages and births at the level of national communities rather than individual behaviour, he noticed that decisions that we experience in our private lives as intractably unpredictable seem to obey general laws. He derived from this observation the hope that we might discover something like an intelligible natural arc bending towards the state of “perpetual peace” explored in the famous essay he devoted to that theme in 1795.<sup>48</sup> In the century to come, Hegel would link this idea to his expressly historical notion of Reason itself, conceived as an active principle whose implicit “cunning” guides human affairs towards the asymptotic yet irresistible self-actualization of universal Spirit.<sup>49</sup> Karl Marx notoriously argued that Hegel’s philosophy made history stand on its head by idealizing the conditions of material scarcity and conflict that, in his view, drive historical events from below. But he too saw an overarching pattern, destined to produce the messianic freedom of the socialist revolution – a revolution however whose focus on humanity in the putatively “objective” mass led later philosophers of history like Jacob Burckhardt, Nietzsche, and Weber to despair of any such happy ending.<sup>50</sup>

Weber in particular systematically urged that Western modernity had replaced the kind of providential outcome Hegel and Marx managed to rescue

from historical process with the inexorable triumph of life-denying capitalism and the soulless rationality of the modern bureaucratic state. As Weber saw it, the metaphysical transformation that made possible not only the thought of Hegel and Marx but the progress of modern *Wissenschaft* in general mandated the strict divorce of fact and value. Turning knowledge into historical sociology, Weber helped bring about the disenchantment of the world he believed he had merely diagnosed.<sup>51</sup> Nor was Weber simply wrong in drawing such dispiriting conclusions. For if the objective is *Wissenschaft* rather than the humbler *Erkenntnis* of empirical discovery, the goal becomes Science with a capital S. The standard is thus absolute and unchallengeable knowledge in the form inherited from the still powerful millennial tradition of *scientia* described earlier in this book; and knowledge of this sort is indeed the enemy of life Weber feared.

As Benjamin puts it in the “epistemo-critical prologue” to the *Trauerspiel* book, “Truth is the death of intention.”<sup>52</sup> This gnomic statement can surely be read as endorsing a lesson characteristic of the culture of fact by which early moderns sought to exercise some sort of rational as well as experimental control over their dealings in the world. The adjudication of matters of fact of the sort early modern experimentalists pursued in both natural and social science does involve a certain surrender of personal intention, as of the emotional and material interests intentions advance. When you determine the balance of your accounts, and the result is a negative number, the fact is you are ruined, painful as the discovery may be. But, inspired by his prologue’s symptomatically neo-Platonic picture of the silent constellations of immutable Ideas that enable us to chart our feckless wanderings in the world of time and change, Benjamin meant a good deal more than that. It is not just that we must set our intentions aside in order to grasp truth; truth kills them in just the way the saturnine picture of historical process Benjamin shares with Weber implies.<sup>53</sup>

However, all of these apparently inescapable consequences of the historical insights underlying the theatrical dialectic of act and action in the work of French tragic poets like Corneille and Racine and their counterparts in Germany, England, and Spain not only suppose the absolutist theory of knowledge we have dueled with throughout this book. They also suppose the ontology that theory underwrites. If, to be true knowledge, knowledge must be knowledge of the Truth, what just is true everywhere and always, once and for all, the acts that people perform must in fact be illusions. Only the encompassing action is real in that that action rigorously conditions the acts that compose it.

But as we have repeatedly seen, there is no Truth in this sense, only what people experimentally discover to be true, a contingent order of things it is in their power to change. Theatre itself teaches this lesson even in its most hieratically tragic mode if only because the occasioning action is pure fiction. The



relation between act and action is genuinely dialectical because each conditions the other, and because both together are emergent properties of the work that results. Corneille's *La Place Royale* and Racine's *Andromache* change the world by becoming part of it. This is true first in strictly numerical terms: the world contains two works of art it did not before. But the function of artworks is not just to populate the world along with all of its other contents. They put that world to the test in such a way as to enable us to perceive it in some new light, and think about the outcome. Like the experiments conducted by experimental natural philosophy or the account-taking of merchants and bankers, the plays, poems, paintings, and treatises we have discussed all actively intervene in the world. They may well be coerced and accidental, prejudiced and misguided, self-defeating and blind. They nonetheless make a difference precisely because they have themselves been made.

To understand more fully how the theatrical dialectics of act and action works in early modern experience, we must then look more closely at the making. And by this I mean not only the poetics involved, the acts of making poets undertake. I also mean the player's part in the business: the art of acting through which plays come to pass and, in so doing, change the order of reality.

### 3. Acting and Ontology in Molière

The French seventeenth century has left a number of accounts of actors and acting. However, as Sabine Chaouche has shown in her exhaustive analysis of "Tart du comédien" in France from 1629 to 1680, much of the best evidence is internal and so implicit. It takes the form of inferences from such features of dramatic texts as stage directions or the placement of prosodic emphases and punctuated pauses.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, the bulk of the external evidence we possess draws on discussions of rhetorical *actio*, the system of gestures, postures, and facial expressions orators learned in order to give a persuasive visual as well as vocal shape to their speeches.<sup>55</sup> Missing from these accounts is concerted focus on acting conceived as an autonomous professional practice in its own right, one dependent neither on parallels with other arts nor on whatever hints may be gleaned from the scripts of the plays actors put on. A consistent feature of the available literature is accordingly its theoretical underdevelopment, especially where the heroic mode of tragedy is concerned.

This underdevelopment may seem perplexing since a signal achievement of "classical" France was the invention of theory itself in the specifically modern sense. In the *Discourse on the Method* (1637) and *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), we meet the self-conscious discipline René Descartes brought to the scientific "search for the truth," imposing order on the rational pursuit of

knowledge through close logical analysis of the conditions of possibility of rational thought as such. We get the systematic lessons in statecraft laid down in Cardinal Richelieu's posthumous *Political Testament* (1688) or Gabriel Naudé's *Political Considerations on Coups d'État* (1639), reducing government to a rigorous science grounded in unblinking scrutiny of the material interests that drive political agents and public sentiments alike. Boileau's *Art of Poetry* presents a synoptic system of literary forms based on the principle of rational self-possession that, for all the awe-inspiring sublimity of its most telling effects, enables poets to say just and only what they mean to say as a function of the critical idea that governs poetic utterance. And we have the equally critical goal that Corneille and François Hédelin, abbé d'Aubignac, set out for themselves, the one in the three discourses on dramatic art framing his collected *Théâtre* of 1660, the other in the *Practice of Theatre* of 1657. In seeking to create a comprehensive guide to dramatic composition of every type, both writers take it for granted that drama is an art that, as such, is susceptible to disciplined analysis deriving practical rules from theoretical clarification of theatre's constitutive effects and the formal means required to produce them.

Yet while, like thought, politics, or verse in general, theatre was theorized in both of its major modes, in all of its characteristic genres, and in each of the working parts for which dramatic poets are responsible, the art of acting on whose success both poetic fame and public pleasure depend was rarely so. Not that period commentators were unaware of the actor's contribution. In the preface to *The Pretentious Young Ladies* (*Les Précieuses ridicules*) of 1659, the first of his plays to have been published with the author's express consent, Molière worries about what readers will make of the text when deprived of the added value of scenic performance: "But since many of the graces people found in the play depend on physical action and tone of voice, I was concerned that they not be shorn of these ornaments, and I felt that the success it had enjoyed in production was handsome enough to leave it at that."<sup>56</sup>

Nor does Molière's anxiety on this score reflect the special insight of a poet who, unlike all other noteworthy French dramatists of the age, actively worked on stage as actor and director as well as poet. We also have the testimony of the private visit the great tragic actor Mondory made to Richelieu on the occasion of his performance as Herod in Tristan L'Hermite's *Mariane* (1636).<sup>57</sup> During this visit, Mondory appears to have recited the play's greatest speech: the soliloquy in which, driven to self-lacerating frenzy by the eponymous heroine's rejection of his love, the tyrant decides to have her killed on trumped-up grounds of "reason of state." The performance of the speech, and the tears it reportedly drew from the cardinal's eye, were accompanied by discussion of the means the actor employed. The cardinal wanted to hear how Mondory decided

to deliver the speech, and above all how he managed the “*altérations du visage*,” the convulsive changes of facial expression needed to convey both poignantly and exactly the conflicting passions that lead to the heroine’s murder.

It is telling that this conversation took place behind closed doors, in the private study screened from public view in which Richelieu and his intimates hatched their Machiavellian designs for national affairs. It is as though, despite everyone’s awareness of it, what actors do, and the craft they bring to doing it, fell under some taboo. Like sex, violent death, or manual labour, activities rigorously banished from the tragic stage of the period, but also like political machinations of the kind the cardinal devised in the very room to which Mondory was admitted for private colloquy, acting was regarded as an unsightly (if not obscene) because, at bottom, irremissibly material operation. As such, it rubs our noses in the messy contingent stuff to which, however lofty the ideals they serve, all works of art of whatever sort risk being reduced.

There were many motives for this silence. We have just mentioned one of them: period distaste for the dismal material contingencies of which the physical business of acting was a symptom and vector. The incorrigible physicality of acting yields a central strain of period commentary. In Paul Scarron’s *Romant comique* (1651–7), a picaresque novel (*romant*) whose title indicates not only that it is funny but that the plot revolves around a troupe of players (*comédiens*) touring the provinces, a basic fact of life for both actors and actresses was the sexual predation to which they were exposed. La Bruyère takes up the theme in his *Characters*, noting with special disapproval the frequency with which society ladies consorted with male romantic leads.<sup>58</sup>

Players’ notorious sexual availability was also at the core of the charges of obscenity levelled at Molière’s *The School for Wives*. The very title provocatively echoes that of *The School for Girls* (1655), a pornographic novel in dialogue form in which an older woman initiates a young girl in sexual matters by teaching her the names for body parts and the uses to which adults put them. The play itself confirmed the public’s worst suspicions not only about Molière’s personal character as a comic actor as well as poet but about the nature of theatre in general as a school of vice instructing impressionable youth in the passions conventional piety sought to suppress. Whence, in the furious public controversy *The School for Wives* touched off, both the accusations of gross indecency aimed at the play and the glee with which Molière’s enemies drew parallels between the cuckoldry to which his comic males were regularly subjected and the irregularities of the playwright’s own household, especially on the score of the conduct of his young actress wife.<sup>59</sup>

At one level all of this is a reflex of Christianity’s age-old anti-theatrical prejudice.<sup>60</sup> From the early church of Tertullian and Augustine on, tracts like

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the English Puritan William Prynne's *Histriomastix* (1632), the Jansenist Pierre Nicole's *Treatise on Theatre* (1665), or the Gallican Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet's *Maxims and Reflections on Theatre* (1694) stigmatized the art as a form of idolatry whose source as well as consequence was the unfettered sexual licence characterizing plays and playhouses alike. A contemporary result was Richelieu's effort to bring theatre under close state supervision in order to eliminate the disorders liable to break out on both sides of the footlights.

But the close bond between acting and sex, and more particularly between acting and prostitution, whether forced or freely contracted, also speaks to the nature of the art. In Richelieu's private interview with Mondory, the focus of conversation was politely displaced towards the upper part of the body: the mouth that pronounces the actor's lines, the face that registers the appropriate emotions, and the mind presumed to govern both from its fastness in the head. Yet mouth, face, and mind are synecdoches for one's person as a whole, and so for those anarchic inner motions the body not only portrays but expresses directly under the public's avid gaze. In the *True Saint Genesius* (1646), Rotrou presents an actor who, commissioned by his pagan masters to perform a play lampooning Christian zealots, is converted to the faith he mocks, becoming in fatal earnest the martyr whose role he performs. In one sense the title character's conversion represents an apology for the stage, dramatizing the contribution *la comédie* can make to propagating the light of faith. But, at another level, the play explores the sacrifice all actors make, as a condition of their craft, in embodying for the public the dark passions that drive all human conduct. Whatever else they do, and however high they aspire, actors put their bodies on the line – and sometimes their lives as well.

One reason then for the period's striking reticence about the art of acting, a reticence underscored rather than contradicted by the torrent of prurient speech about the civil condition of actors as publicly private persons, was a reality principle paradoxically intensified by the fact that actors are *comédiens*: fakers who merely play at being the people they portray onstage, and nowhere more distressingly than when the people they play are meant to be seen as nobly surmounting the lower registers of existence to which their bodies bear witness. This idea conditions the underlying thrust of Nicole's *Treatise*. Like his later *The Visionaries* (1667), which broadens the attack to encompass prose romance as well as theatre, the *Treatise* focuses on heroic genres as opposed to the self-evidently lower mode of comedy precisely in order to spotlight the gap between the standards of nobility aimed at and the depravity of the means involved. What makes theatre so diabolical as well as "visionary" or delusional is not just the incorrigibly carnal nature of the words and deeds it sets forth; it is its power to deceive us into taking it for something other than it is.

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What after all is even the most heroic or uplifting tragedy, Corneille's *Le Cid* or *Nicomède*, really about? Viewed in the way the poet and his theatrical confederates promote, plays like these are about humanity's capacity for ennobling self-transcendence. In the sacrificial act thanks to which *Le Cid*'s Rodrigue and Chimène prove worthy of each other on the strength of their willingness to immolate the love they share on the altar of familial duty, or in the unyielding courageous clarity with which *Nicomède*'s eponymous hero teaches his royal father how to act the part of a king in proud defiance of imperial Roman extortion, we get precisely the sort of delusional vision Nicole deplores. And the theme of that vision is our power to sublimate the fleshly emotions of love, hate, fear, ambition, or greed in the service of an ideal beyond the reach of ordinary mortals. La Bruyère captures the idea in the famous comparison of Corneille and Racine cited earlier, where the one is praised for portraying human beings as they are, the other for depicting them as they should be. Yet the key point for Nicole is the one La Bruyère makes without noticing it. However thoroughly Cornelian theatre may persuade us of the kind of self-transcendence his heroes and heroines achieve, the inspiring passions remain the ones Racine more faithfully indicts. And for all the flattering delicacy he brings to the task, insofar as Racine thereby shows us what we are rather than what we ought to be, he convicts us of the truth Corneille claims to overcome.

The problem theatre in general, and acting in particular, posed for seventeenth-century France, heightened by the actorly bodies whose promiscuous availability gave the lie to the heroic alibis of the tragic stage, was accordingly a problem of being. Whatever theatre may pretend to be, it cannot conceal what it is: a mirror of the passions, and so of the sins, that dictate the carnal substance of plot and performance alike. The ontological imperative behind French thought about theatre accounts for the difficulty period commentators had in theorizing acting as an art. On the one hand, as Nicole's denunciation of the pretense involved in Cornelian drama indicates, everyone was conscious of the fact that actors are only players. Though the characters they portray may in some sense be real, especially given the era's predilection for "historical" subjects drawn from epic, myth, and the Bible as well as history narrowly understood, the actors themselves merely play at being the persons whose roles they perform. Period thought about acting therefore retained an awareness of the fundamental ambiguity inscribed in Corneille's heroic *Nicomède*, a character whose name, as we have seen, is an anagram for *comédien*. However, in keeping with the drive for clarity the age set itself as a central aesthetic as well as intellectual task, thereby justifying the "classical" epithet the era's actual productions signally problematize, the dominant tendency was to resolve the ambiguity by referring it back to the ontological canons it called in question.

Seen in a positive light, the ontological imperative controlling thought about acting bore out the claims to exemplary self-overcoming in which Corneille specialized. What is so conspicuously noble in Nicomède's conduct is precisely his awareness of the role he and his father are called to play as monarchs: kings whose sovereignty is granted only once they understand that it is not in fact granted at all but rather actively achieved on the basis of self-determined ascent beyond their own natural limits. And what could possibly have brought tears to Richelieu's eyes in Mondory's performance of Herod if not a measure of the painful sacrifice the cardinal himself felt called to make in his supra-personal identity as the ministerial master of the nation's affairs? Just because Mondory's Herod fails to live up to his role as king, descending into the madness to which the titanic struggle with his own inner demons condemns him, he directly embodies the psychological struggle Richelieu himself waged.

Yet the very fact that Richelieu was able to recognize his own image in the mad tyrant suggests that the same phenomenon can also be seen in a deeply negative light. It entails, for instance, the kind of outwardly directed deception associated with the art of dissimulation that occupied so central a place in contemporary court literature. And with the power to deceive others comes the risk of the sort of self-deception for which, as ineffably sentimental as they are surprising, Richelieu's tears supply a ready index.<sup>61</sup>

But however ambiguous the phenomenon may be, the claim to being proves decisive. Though Nicomède's right to sovereignty is verified only insofar as he becomes the king whose part he plays, he does in fact become one; and if Herod winds up turning into a tyrant, a tyrant is just what the Bible shows him to have been. Similarly, the basic presumption about skilled acting, especially in the tragic mode, is that actors can only play what they are able to feel. The key to Mondory's expression of Herod's tortured state of mind implies his power not simply to represent but, as the indispensable means to that end, to produce that state in his own thoughts and emotions.

Such is the thrust of the second chapter of Nicole's *Treatise*. As the chapter's title indicates, the first reason for condemning theatre derives from the "wicked" and "illicit" character of "le métier de Comédien," the actor's trade itself. Nicole is categorical on this point: "It is impossible to contemplate the actor's trade, and to compare it to the duties of Christianity, without acknowledging that there is nothing more unworthy of a child of God and member of the body of Jesus Christ than this line of work." Nicole stresses however that the grounds for this blanket condemnation are not merely the familiar moral ones bearing on the depraved "condition" or lifestyle involved. After all, theatre's apologists can always argue that the debauched morals associated with players are at least logically distinguishable from the actual work they perform onstage. As Nicole



adds, "I do not only speak of the gross unruliness, and of the dissolute manner in which women appear on the stage, because theatre's defenders invariably imagine they can separate these sorts of disorders from the art even though they can never truly separate them from it." While Nicole dismisses this separation as imaginary, the "gross disorders," and in particular the "dissolute" consequences of bringing women to the stage, are nonetheless the symptom rather than the cause of the depravity of the actor's craft. A true diagnosis requires stepping back to look at what the art itself demands as an entirely inseparable expression of its essential nature as an art.

The result is one of the most famous because one of the few accounts the period has left of actors at work backstage:

It is a trade in which men and women represent passions of hatred, anger, ambition, vengeance, and chiefly love. It is necessary (*il faut*) that they express them as naturally and as vividly as they can; and they are unable to do so unless they in some sense (*en quelque sorte*) arouse them in themselves so as to imprint them in their souls in order to be able to express them externally in gesture and speech. It is thus necessary (*il faut*) that those who portray a passion of love be in some sense (*en quelque sorte*) touched by it while they portray it. Now, one must not imagine that one can efface from one's mind the impression one has voluntarily excited in it, or that this impression does not leave behind a great disposition toward the passions one has chosen to feel. Theatre is accordingly by its very nature a school and an exercise of vice since one is necessarily obliged to arouse vicious passions in oneself. If one goes on to consider that actors' lives are wholly consumed in this exercise, that they spend all of their time either learning it in private or rehearsing it among themselves or representing it before spectators, and that they have almost nothing but these follies in their minds, one will readily see that it is impossible to align this trade with the purity of our religion.<sup>62</sup>

The categorical condemnation of the art of acting thus goes hand in hand with the equally categorical imperative according to which "to be" in the sense of playing a tragic hero or heroine means becoming the character one plays. The key point here is that, like any other art, acting not only represents what it portrays; it expresses it, converting the concealed inside of passion into what, speaking of the sister art of painting, Norman Bryson has called the "legible body" of external physical form.<sup>63</sup> From this standpoint, as Joseph Roach has shown, anyone who wants to get an idea of what, say, fear would look like on the French classical stage need only cast an eye on how Charles Le Brun depicts that emotion in his manual for painters on *The General and Particular Expression of the Passions* (1698).<sup>64</sup> What enables painters to capture the external form

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of feeling is mastery of the anatomical and physiological machinery by which any given passion communicates its inner motions to the surface of the body it animates. Who feels fear mechanically expresses it in the spasmodic furling of the brow, the exorbitant round-eyed intensity of the stare, and the gaping of the mouth as it gasps for air.

The difference is that, where painters work from the outside in, portraying emotion in the form of bodies other than their own, actors work from the inside out, proceeding from the inwardness of the emotion itself to its external manifestation in the words they speak, the tone of voice appropriate to those words, and gestures and alterations of face in harmony with that tone. The actor's instrument is also her medium, and that medium is neither more nor less than the body she sets in motion, the machinery that gives that motion its expressive pattern, and the feelings of which that pattern is the inescapable accompaniment because they form its necessary source.

Yet the ontological imperative that determined the general shape of mainline period theory of acting was not as secure or self-evident as Mondory's interview with Richelieu or Nicole's forensic analysis might suggest. Note, for instance, the conscientious modalizers with which Nicole qualifies what he otherwise depicts as the blinding self-evidence of the psychic machinery acting mobilizes. We are told that, when actors play their roles, it is absolutely necessary (*il faut*) that they express the passions as naturally and vividly as possible, and that they can only do so "if they in some sense (*en quelque sorte*) arouse them in themselves." From which Nicole concludes that, in preparing to play the passion of love, say, it is again absolutely necessary (*il faut*) that "they be in some sense (*en quelque sorte*) touched by it while they portray it." The assertion of inescapable necessity is modified by the implicit recognition that, as faithfully and vividly as players reproduce the verbal, gestural, and expressive tokens of inner passion, there is at most only a sense in which they can actually be said to feel it.

For they are, precisely, players, skilled at dissimulating their own private characters and emotions in the interests of creating the illusion of being someone else – the person who appears before us, or rather seems to appear before us, onstage. From this standpoint, as indeed we are reminded by the etymology of the word "hypocrite," an overworked term of abuse derived from the ancient Greek *hypocrites* or actor, the problem acting poses is less that actors become what they play than our inability to tell the difference between person and role. The actor joins the family of cheats with whom seventeenth-century moralists were even more obsessed than with actors: impostors, casuists, counterfeits, courtiers, monarchs, and faithless wives, all of whom exhibit the power of passing false coin for true, and true for false.

The category of being as applied to actors thus gives way to a deficit of being inscribed in the use of the verb “to be” itself. The fact will not come into proper focus until Denis Diderot’s *Paradox on the Actor*, completed in 1778, and circulated in manuscript, though not published till 1830, long after the author’s death. The *Paradox* is a dialogue whose core thesis, yielding the title, turns Nicole’s theory of acting on its head by arguing that the key to great acting lies in *not* feeling the emotions one plays. Feeling in general, what the eighteenth century calls “sensibility,” is for Diderot the business of spectators rather than players, a neurological keyboard on which actors play just insofar as they remain immune to the feelings they simultaneously mimic and inspire.

It is crucial to the wider case he makes that, in developing this principle in the context of acting as an art, Diderot generalizes it to the sphere of successful human action at large by exploiting the ambiguity surrounding the copula on which the argument turns. The discussion of actors of genius thereby slides almost unnoticed into discussion of genius in general, a power characterized by just the kind of self-possessed insensibility Diderot’s spokesman has shown distinguishes great actors from the people who make good audiences. For what makes a good audience is that readiness to succumb to uncritical emotion that causes “l’homme sensible” or man of feeling to lose his head “at the least unexpected circumstance” – say, a skillfully managed *coup de théâtre* of the sort that provides a close analogy for Naudé’s equally dramatic because unexpected *coups d’État*. The result is that, unlike a great actor, such a man “will be neither a great king, nor a great minister, nor a great captain, nor a great advocate, nor a great physician. Fill the audience with crybabies like that, but don’t put any of them on the stage.”<sup>65</sup> But what does this suggest if not that great action of any kind depends on the lack of being that characterizes great acting? True, in French as in English, “to be” in theatre means “to play”: Mondory “is” Herod only in the sense of acting in that role. Yet the fact that Diderot can shift so seamlessly between these two contrasting uses of the verb fingers the sense in which they are not so different after all. Being itself, where humans are concerned, exhibits the potential absence or lack to which the human capacity for acting, in both uses of the term, supplies the crucial clue.

It is this insight that mainstream French classical thought seems not only to have failed to grasp but to have sought to suppress as exposing the degree to which the self-discipline acting involves in whatever sense of the word implies a lack of being in whose light the canons of immutable moral truth that theatre’s enemies defend lose credibility. This in turn helps explain not only why classical France produced so little in the way of a theory of acting but why such theory as it did produce tended to take the form of attacks like

Nicole's. But it also helps explain why the one period commentator who did have a handle on the issue came to stand at the very centre of the assaults on theatre in general of which Nicole's *Treatise* and Bossuet's *Maxims* are major documents.<sup>66</sup>

The exception to the rule was Molière. That Molière should have been able to come to grips with the problem reflects in the first instance the fact that he was an actor and director as well as poet. Moreover, as witnessed by the pirated first edition of the one-act farce *Sganarelle, or the Imaginary Cuckold*, brought out by the publisher Jean Ribou in 1660, he was celebrated for introducing a professional discipline not seen before.

The remarkable thing about Ribou's edition is that, beyond the text of the play, it presents a scene-by-scene account of its "argument," that is, of the plot as it unfolds over the course of actual performance. The chief source of public pleasure was the play's impact in the playhouse; and the basis for this impact lay in the details of staging and delivery. The author of the account, an otherwise unknown and doubtless pseudonymous sieur de Neufvillennaine, accordingly comments on such things as the timing not only of individual lines but of exchanges of glances, each of them precisely placed for maximum effect. He also describes the production's blocking, noting how the actors' steps were carefully counted to enhance the sense of an ensemble as opposed to the more traditional congeries of individual *farceurs* intent on doing their separate turns. Above all, Neufvillennaine dwells on Molière's performance in the title role, and in particular the ceaseless *démontage*, convulsive changes of expression whose prime showcase was the tortured soliloquy in scene 17 during which, steeling himself to challenge the play's romantic hero to a duel, Sganarelle feverishly oscillates between outraged honour, wounded vanity, and commonsense alarm at the prospect of getting killed. Whatever the virtues of the script, what carried the day was the crisp authority of the comic "business" the company achieved under its director's strict supervision.

It is striking however that even Molière touches only briefly on the art of acting. Indeed, the one place where the art appears as an explicit theme in his work is the *Versailles Impromptu*, a one-act play, said to have been commissioned by the reigning monarch Louis XIV, composed in response to the heated controversy surrounding *The School for Wives*.

The *Impromptu* is the second of three plays defending its author against the charges of indecency and irreligion *The School for Wives* brought on his head. The first, the *Critique of the School for Wives* (1663), which features the earliest attested use of the word "obscenity" in French, stages a salon conversation in which the assembled characters debate the improprieties of the play's language: the salacious resonance of a joke about cream tarts; a scandalous dangling

article (*le*) that encourages spectators to think of unmentionable body parts until its referent turns out to be an innocuous sartorial accessory (a ribbon); the analogy drawn between sexual jealousy and a man's annoyance at discovering that another man has stuck a thumb in his bowl of soup. The third defence is *Tartuffe* (1664–9), the magnificently ill-considered accusation of hypocrisy levelled at the “cabale des dévots,” the pious party at court that seized on the controversy surrounding *The School for Wives* to renew the attack on the morality of theatre in general, citing Molière as its diabolical epitome.

By contrast, the *Impromptu* focuses on the rival theatrical company directed by the decade's leading tragic actor, the player-impresario Montfleury, and the poets in his entourage: Edmé Boursault, author of *The Portrait of the Painter, or the Counter-Critique of The School for Wives* (1663), which ridiculed Molière in person as a frantically jealous husband powerless to control his young actress wife; and the Corneille brothers, enraged at the fun *The School for Wives* had poked at one (“gros Pierre”) for his obesity and the other (Thomas) for his delusions of social grandeur. Given its targets, it is thus entirely appropriate that the *Impromptu* should address the details of the actor's craft.

The conceit on which the *Impromptu* turns is that the company rehearses a play for the king that never in fact gets staged since, as the actors learn to their immense relief, his majesty is called away suddenly on business and cancels the performance at the last minute. The situation is indeed desperate: the author having had little time to write the play, the players have had even less to learn their parts, leaving them ill-prepared. To make matters worse, Molière's partner, sometime lover, and mother-in-law Madeleine Béjart, played by herself, interrupts the rehearsal to say that the poet should have written a quite different play than the one the company now rehearses. He should have composed a play about actors he has apparently talked about for some time, a “comédie des comédiens” in which he would pillory Montfleury's troupe for the flaws in their performance of Boursault's *Portrait of the Painter*:

It was ready-made for the business, and well-suited to the matter, and all the more so in that, having undertaken to paint your portrait, they created the opportunity to paint theirs in turn, which had a better right to be called their portrait than anything they did could be called yours. For to set out to counterfeit an actor in a comic role is not to paint the man himself; it is to paint, after him, the characters he represents, and so to use the same traits and the same colours he is obliged to employ in the different pictures of ridiculous characters he imitates after nature. But to counterfeit an actor in a serious role is to depict faults that are entirely his since serious parts call for none of the gestures or ridiculous tones of voice in which we recognize the man himself. (2.824)

The first point concerns a common and, as it were, structural misunderstanding. People – even ostensibly well-informed people like Montfleury and Boursault – confuse comic actors with their roles not only because they generally identify actors with their characters but because, unlike tragic heroes, comic characters are painted “after nature,” as figures drawn from everyday life. In Molière’s case, this leads them to treat him like a cuckold because he portrays cuckolds: rather than impute the portrait’s accuracy to his skill as an actor, they assume he just is the part he performs.

But the reminder that good comic actors disappear into their roles sets the stage for a second, deeper point: the trouble with tragic actors is that, precisely because they play “serious roles,” it is all too easy for them to fail to disappear in the way a good comic actor will. Where making fun of comic actors amounts to making fun of the parts they play, tragic actors are all the more vulnerable in that what we make fun of in their performances really does belong to them. When comic actors make us laugh, it is because they have their characters right. When tragic actors make us laugh, it is because they leave a residue, and this residue is nothing less than their personal flaws as actors.

The idea that actors are supposed to erase their personal idiosyncrasies in the interests of fostering belief in their roles sets the stage for a direct attack on Montfleury himself, and in particular on the personal indiscipline evinced by his corpulent belly. As the leading actor in his company, Montfleury gets to play kings. The trouble is that his love of eating has made him entirely unfit for such parts – unless, like the ridiculous poet in the following imagined dialogue Molière plays with himself, what you want is in fact the Falstaffian girth Montfleury brings:

“And who does kings among you?” “Here’s an actor who sometimes takes them on.” “Who? This handsome young man? Are you mocking me? One needs a king as big and fat as four together; a king, by God, stuffed in the right way; a king of vast circumference who can fill a throne in the proper style. What an absurd idea, to cast a king with the waistline of a young gallant!” (2.825)

Nor is it just that Montfleury cannot resist stuffing his face; he does not know how to recite his lines properly, leading Molière to parody his style of delivery. Having heard the “handsome young man” recite some verses from Corneille’s *Nicomède*, Molière’s imaginary poet breaks in to set him straight:

What! You call that reciting? What a joke! You have to give the words emphasis. Listen to me.

[*He mimics Montfleury, excellent actor of the Hôtel de Bourgogne.*]

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*Shall I tell you, Araspe? etc.*

Do you see this posture? Mark it well. There, stress the last line properly. That's what inspires the audience's approval and prompts a brouhaha. (2.825–6)

Though the performance is inaudible to those who, like us today, have had no chance to hear Montfleury speak, the parody's resemblance to the original must have been readily apparent to Molière's immediate audience.

However, Molière's decisive contribution to the modern ontology of acting comes two scenes later, once rehearsal gets underway. One member of the troupe, La Grange, seems in particular difficulty. La Grange has been asked to play the part of a marquis, by which everyone involved, the audience included, understands a fop and witling. The question then is how to play a marquis; and, usually cast in the role of the romantic lead, it is clear from the moment he enters for the play's opening dialogue between himself and a second marquis, played by Molière, that he is having trouble:

LA GRANGE: Good day, marquis.

MOLIÈRE: Good lord! That's not at all the tone of a marquis. You have to take it up a notch, and most of these gentlemen affect a singular style of speaking in order to distinguish them from the rabble. *Good day, marquis*. Start again.

LA GRANGE: Good day, marquis. (2.831)

Quite apart from the striking way in which the exchange highlights the stark difference between script and performance, between "Good day, marquis" as it appears on the page and "Good day, marquis" as La Grange mispronounces it before his director sets him straight, several things grab for attention here. One is the fact that, in order to get the tone of voice and manner of speaking down right, including the ludicrous falsetto marquis are understood to affect, La Grange has first to unlearn the routines perfected for his standard roles as comedic lover. It helps that he has models – first in the person of Molière, who both explains what to do and shows him how to do it, and then in the marquis themselves, many of whom may be presumed to sit in the audience and about whom both players and other members of the audience share the same idea. The deep point, though, is that playing a marquis demands reshaping one's native tone of voice, patterns of inflexion, facial expression, posture, and gestures to conform to a foreign exemplar.

But this in turn emphasizes not only that playing means acting but that La Grange has been acting all along. To be sure, since La Grange has been onstage for some time now, we are invited to suppose that he is not always acting: on the contrary, the play's conceit requires that he convey some sense of what he looks

and sounds like when engaged in talking things over backstage. But this signals the change the audience is meant to detect the moment he appears in character, as a marquis. The problem is that, when the actual rehearsal is understood to begin, he reverts to his standard turn as romantic lead. There is thus a discernible shift from playing himself to playing the handsome lover. La Grange is accordingly “in character” throughout; it is just that he keeps playing the wrong character until the director shows him what is wanted. Who the “real” La Grange may be turns out to be a problem because La Grange is, precisely, an actor whose whole art lies in his chameleon-like power to change shape before our very eyes in just the way Molière makes him do in these opening lines of the scene they rehearse.

So from the moment the rehearsal begins – that is, from the moment Molière and his company cease pretending to be themselves in order to pretend to rehearse their parts for a play that never gets staged since the rehearsal is itself the play they stage – our attention is directed to the gap between who the actors are and the parts they play, and thus to the vocal, expressive, and gestural techniques that gap demands even as it makes them possible. And just in case we miss the point, the play makes it again a moment later when the actor Brécourt comes on. The two marquis quarrel about which of them was the model for the ineffably witless member of the tribe ridiculed in Molière’s *Critique*:

LA GRANGE: To whom should we turn to decide the matter?

MOLIÈRE: Here’s a man who can judge. Chevalier.

BRÉCOURT: What?

MOLIÈRE: Great. Here’s another one taking the tone of a marquis. Didn’t I tell you that the role you’re playing demands that you speak naturally?

BRÉCOURT: It’s true.

MOLIÈRE: Right, then, Chevalier.

BRÉCOURT: What? (2.832)

The joke now concerns what it means to “speak naturally.” We do of course have an implicit standard by which to judge, just as we do for La Grange’s corrected performance as a marquis. But the fact that Brécourt has as it were to recover the right tone underscores the fact that “natural” speech belongs to the same repertoire as its foppish opposite.

It is here then that we find both the underlying theory of acting at work on the seventeenth-century French stage and the reasons behind the period’s failure to spell it out. As the theory’s emergence in Molière suggests, its tenor is essentially comic. This is in part because, involving a descent into the physical contingencies of disciplined technical labour, comedy is the only

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appropriate setting for it. But it is also and more fundamentally because what the theory teaches is the irremissibly contingent and therefore malleable nature of reality itself.

It is crucial in this context that we notice that Molière largely makes the point by ridiculing the performances of tragic actors, and that the passage of verse he uses to do so comes from Corneille's *Nicomède*. As it happens, the speech in question is delivered by the hero's father Prusias, and it exhibits more than any other the father's sub-heroic character. In the speech, Prusias explains to his confidant Araspe the deepest reason for his anger at his son's uninvited arrival at court from the army following his unexampled conquest of no fewer than three rival kingdoms:

Te le dirai-je, Araspe? il m'a trop bien servi,  
 Augmentant mon pouvoir, il me l'a tout ravi;  
 Il n'est plus mon Sujet, qu'autant qu'il le veut être,  
 Et qui me fait régner en effet est mon maître.  
 Pour paraître à mes yeux, son mérite est trop grand,  
 On n'aime point à voir ceux à qui l'on doit tant,  
 Tout ce qu'il a fait parle au moment qu'il m'approche,  
 Et sa seule présence est un secret reproche.<sup>67</sup>

[Shall I confess it, Araspe? He has served me too well;  
 Augmenting my power, he has stolen it from me.  
 He is no longer my Subject except forasmuch as he wants to be,  
 And he who makes me reign is in effect my master.  
 His merit is too great for him to appear before my eyes;  
 One dislikes seeing those to whom one owes so much.  
 Everything he has done speaks in the instant he approaches me,  
 And his sole presence is a veiled reproach.]

The speech itself is already telling, and not least because it presents the results of the dramatic experiment the Cornelian source performs. In returning from the army to the court, *Nicomède* puts his father to the test and, in ignominiously failing that test, Prusias reveals what he really is – old, infirm, fearful, jealous, and increasingly paranoid. However, in mimicking, for comic effect, the way in which Montfleury has been seen and heard to deliver the speech onstage, right down to the hammy postures the tragic actor was known to strike and the portentous emphases he gave the lines to provoke the “brouhaha” of public admiration, Molière performs an experiment of his own. The instruments he uses are his voice, his body, and his inside knowledge of the player's

art. And the experimental matter of fact they enable him produce – and thus ad-duce at his rival's expense – becomes crystal clear: Montfleury's incompetence in the role of a tragic king.

Yet it is not just Montfleury's performance that Molière pillories. The parody of the rival troupe's impresario is rapidly followed by pastiches of the company's other leading actors, Beauchâteau, Hauteroche, De Villiers, and even Montfleury's leading lady, Mademoiselle Beauchâteau. The point is not only that all of them are bad actors; they are bad actors in part because tragedy encourages and even demands it. As Molière's spokesman Dorante puts it in the *Critique* in making the case for comedy's superiority to the tragic form,

I find that it's much easier to puff oneself up with grandiose sentiments, defy Fortune in verse, launch accusations at the Fates, and fling insults at the Gods than it is to enter as one should into the foibles of men and depict everybody's flaws amusingly onstage. When you paint Heroes, you do what you like; these are portraits done at pleasure in which one seeks no resemblance, and you have only to follow the lead strings of an imagination that takes flight, and often leaves the true to catch the marvelous. But when you paint men, you must paint after Nature. One wants portraits that resemble their subjects, and you've done nothing if you don't make the audience recognize the people of your age. (1.504–5)

If then Montfleury's players bend body and soul out of all recognition, it is because tragedy is itself inherently deformed. What makes it so is its absurd metaphysical self-importance and the pressure this exerts on the human frame. To see it, all you need do is subject it to the physical experiment Molière mounts onstage. Molière “does” Montfleury and his leading lady; and what enables him to do it is the lack of heroically immutable being that makes him a true actor.

In Molière, then, acting is fully embraced as a mode not of being but of doing, opening the way for Diderot's still ostensibly paradoxical account of 1778. Actors not only put on, they make a play; and in doing so, they make and then re-make themselves as agents rather than recipients of the characters and qualities they take on. As Diderot later points out, however, the result is not simply a theory of acting as an art but a theory of what it takes to act in general. The “insensibility” he assigns great actors, the curious lack of being that enables them to do their job, at once indexes and promotes the open-ended freedom needed to be, and so become, a great anything. And in this process of self-determined becoming we discover a condition of historical change as integral as any the nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy of historical disenchantment will allege. The lesson the *Paradox* teaches, a lesson already enacted in its essentials in Molière's *Impromptu*, reveals the intimate link between the

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early modern sense of embodied agency and what enabled early moderns to begin to think in fully historical terms. Change – even cataclysmically epochal change of the sort Benjamin associates with the German baroque – does not simply happen: people make it happen, blind as they may be to their own motives and to the consequences of what they do. By the time that, in Diderot, theory catches up with the player's art, the world will have definitively changed in just the way theatre's enemies feared it would. And as the ultimate course of events will prove, the outcome will be nothing short of revolutionary.

# The Experiment of Beauty: *Vraisemblance Extraordinaire* in Lafayette's *Princesse de Clèves*

Marie-Madeleine Pioche de La Vergne, comtesse de Lafayette's *Princesse de Clèves* (1678) is often described as Europe's first modern psychological novel.<sup>1</sup> This apparent truism has recently run into difficulties, however. There is, for instance, the book's complex debt to the great *romans fleuves* of seventeenth-century French romance, Honoré d'Urfé's *L'Astrée* (1607–28), Gauthier de Coste, seigneur de La Calprenède's *Cassandre* (1642–50), and above all Madeleine de Scudéry's *Clélie* (1654–61). As I argue below, Lafayette hews more closely to the messy contingencies of amorous relationship than her romantic precursors. Nevertheless, the *Princesse* avoids the coarseness associated with the demotic realism of texts like Charles Sorel's salacious *Histoire comique de Francion* (1633) or Paul Scarron's picaresque *Roman comique* (1657). Indeed, its heroine embodies an ideal of romantic virtue we will not see in the French novel proper until Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* of 1761.<sup>2</sup>

Then again, as Nicholas Page points out, the book did not make literary history in the way we conventionally assume. In particular, it did not become the direct model for the *roman d'analyse*, a form that only comes into its own in the nineteenth century. On the contrary, it was seen in its own day as a *nouvelle historique*, a “secret history” fictionalizing the private lives of real historical individuals. Rather than being regarded as striking out in some bold new direction, contemporary readers like Jean-Baptiste-Henri de Troussel, seigneur de Valincour, identified it as a puzzling exemplar of a story type they already knew well. From this point of view, the book's most novel feature was its failure to meet the criteria of fiction of that sort. For as Valincour noted, its heroine was “impossible” in that she corresponded to no known, historically identifiable person. There was then no “secret history” of which it offered a fictional extension or embellishment. As a result, the *Princesse* found no period imitators, and so left little if any mark on the literature of the time.<sup>3</sup>



And yet for all its resemblance to romance, and despite the absence of immediate literary posterity, it is hard to call the book anything but a novel. Lafayette's tale certainly looks like a novel. For one thing, it makes a remarkably fresh contribution to the courtly *casuistique de l'amour*, the sophistical and sophisticated centuries-old French obsession with love and the infinitesimally fine distinctions brought to bear on the intricately subtle "cases" of affairs of the heart. There is, for example, the narrator's famous analysis of the prince de Clèves's paradoxical condition in marrying a sixteen-year-old girl who, fond as she may be, does not (and cannot) love him in return:

M. de Clèves knew himself to be happy without however being entirely content. He saw with considerable pain that Mlle. de Chartres's feelings did not exceed those of esteem and submission, and he could not flatter himself that she concealed more obliging ones since their engagement permitted her to let them appear without offending her extreme modesty. (270–1)

The concluding diagnosis of the prince's plight is a celebrated summit of the Gallic psychology of love:

M. de Clèves did not find that Mlle. de Chartres changed sentiment in changing her name. His status as husband gave him greater privileges, but it did not give him a new place in his wife's heart. This meant in turn that, in becoming her husband, he did not cease being her lover, for there was always something to wish for beyond possessing her. (272)

A similar incident occurs later in the book, once the heroine has finally met and fallen in love with the glamorous duc de Nemours. When Nemours is injured in a riding accident, Mme de Clèves's frantic anxiety betrays her hidden passion for him. However, her dismay at revealing her secret gives way to agony of a deeper kind when a letter from a reproachful mistress turns up which everyone mistakenly supposes to have dropped from Nemour's pocket during his fall. The narrator proceeds to dissect the heroine's torment, describing in minute detail her sleepless nocturnal struggle with a hitherto unknown source of psychic pain for which, in her youthful inexperience, she lacks even the proper name:

What a sight and what a discovery for a person of her temperament, who had a violent passion, who had just conveyed marks of it to a man she judged unworthy of it and to another whom she mistreated for love of him! Never has there been affliction so biting and acute as this; and it seemed to her that what made her

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affliction so bitter was the other thing that had happened that day. For she would not have cared so much about his loving another woman had she not given him grounds to believe that she loved him. But she was mistaken, and the evil she found so unbearable was jealousy, with all of the horrors by which it can be attended. (326)

Most remarkable of all in this line is perhaps the conjugal nightmare that follows the public revelation of the princess's confession to her husband of her love for another man. Since the confession took place at a moment when the couple wrongly believed themselves free of witnesses, each believes the other responsible for its publication. The prince accuses his wife of indiscretion on the grounds that only she could have divulged their secret. The heroine rebuts the charge by arguing that, since she confessed her passion in order to enlist his support in fighting it, she had no reason to confide it to someone else. But, as M de Clèves retorts, who could have had less reason to broadcast his shame than he? Both thus agree that one of them must have leaked the secret even though neither admits to having done so since neither did – they were in fact overheard by the heroine's lover Nemours, and it was he who revealed it to a friend. The fruit of the princess's confession is a Bergmanesque hell of endlessly recycled cross-recriminations:

They were both so preoccupied with their own thoughts that they sat for a long time without speaking, and they emerged from this silence only to say over again the same things they had already said to each other several times, leaving their hearts and minds more estranged and angered than before. (368)

Nor do the book's novelistic credentials depend solely on its often breathtaking psychological realism. It is also distinguished by what contemporary readers saw as the almost pedantic care with which it describes the story's historical setting at the court of the Valois monarch, Henri II.<sup>4</sup>

To be sure, the historiographical principles it applies to Henri's court are those of the "secret history" conventions of historical explanation from which the *Princesse* otherwise oddly deviates. In the tradition of secret histories, the springs of political events lie in the sphere of private relationships, and their causes are often loves and hates of a specifically sexual kind. Thus, in place of the kind of deep-seated social and political motives later historians look for, Lafayette's narrator stresses, for instance, the queen's hatred for the royal *maitresse en titre* Diane de Poitiers, duchesse de Valentinois, a woman whose spell over the king allows her to monopolize access to the Crown. As Mme de

Chartres is reported to explain in preparing her daughter for her new station in life,

Ambition and gallantry were the soul of that court, and preoccupied men and women alike. There were so many interests and so many different cabals, and the ladies had so large a role to play, that love was always mingled with court business, and court business with love. No one was tranquil or indifferent; everyone gave thought to rising, pleasing, serving, or betraying. No one experienced either boredom or idleness, and everyone was ceaselessly engrossed in pleasures or plots. (264)

There is then much that strikes us today as comically naive and self-infatuated in the noble Lafayette's strikingly parochial conception of political process.<sup>5</sup>

Lafayette is nonetheless unusually sensitive to deeper patterns of political interest and behaviour, patterns by which her characters' inner lives are conditioned in ways none of them quite recognizes. By setting the action at the court of Henri II around the time of the king's death in 1559 as the result of a jousting accident, Lafayette places the story on the eve of the Conspiracy of Amboise of 1560: an attempt by court Huguenots to kidnap Henri's young successor in order to seize control of the state in self-defence against the growing Catholic reaction led by the duc de Guise and his brother, the cardinal de Lorraine. Nothing could be more foreign to Lafayette's notion of historical events than what we now take to be the driving forces behind the nearly four decades of religious civil war the Amboise conspiracy helped ignite.<sup>6</sup> But she does finger at least some of the major elements in citing the Protestant connétable de Montmorency's efforts to extend royal mastery in the teeth of feudal resistance and the part that political ambition as well as religious conviction played in making the Guise brothers his enemies (256–7). However exclusively the main action focuses on love affairs, the story is overshadowed from the start by awareness of the impending national disaster in which all of its major historical actors soon find themselves embroiled.

The book's novelistic character is sharpened further still by the broadly Jansenist anthropology it espouses, as by the political as well as creedal interests with which Jansenism was associated.<sup>7</sup> Lafayette was the intimate friend, and doubtless lover, of François, duc de La Rochefoucauld, author of the notorious *Maxims* (1678) in which the fount of all human conduct and feeling is shown to be base *amour-propre*, the relentless love of self La Rochefoucauld portrays as driving all thought and action. Along with the dark, Augustinian sense of original sin to which La Rochefoucauld gave a new, psychologistic face, Lafayette shared her friend's politics: those of the "Fronde des princes," a noble

revolt against the encroaching power of the central monarchy that was in many ways a continuation of the putatively religious struggle the Guise had waged.<sup>8</sup> As Paul Bénichou classically argues, the central fact about the Fronde was the defeat it suffered, and the way that defeat contributed to the disillusionment that coloured much elite culture in the late seventeenth century.<sup>9</sup> Political disappointment was thus increasingly associated with the bleak Jansenist picture of boundless human depravity informing Lafayette's focus on the private rivalries, petty jealousies, and personal betrayals that characterize not only life at court but the human condition in general.

Typical from this standpoint is one of the book's most controversial as well as moving scenes: the one in which the princess refuses to give her hand to the man she loves following her husband's death. She is led to this extraordinary action not simply by a sense of duty to the dead man, and guilt at the role her adulterous (if unconsummated) passion played in bringing his death about. She is also moved by the surely wise suspicion that Nemours's love for her will not last, great and sincere as it may be:

"I confess," she replied, "that my passions may drive me; but they cannot make me blind. Nothing can prevent me from understanding that you were born with all of the dispositions required for gallantry and with all of the qualities apt to ensure a happy outcome in such affairs. You have already had several passions, and would have more of them; I would cease making for your happiness; I would see you feeling for another what you had felt for me. I would suffer a mortal hurt, and doubt I could even guard against the pain of jealousy. I have already said too much to conceal from you that you have acquainted me with that emotion [... and] that I have retained an idea that convinces me that it is the greatest of all evils." (409)

As the heroine's lack of faith in male fidelity suggests, the realism the *Princesse* brings to the portrayal of love is integral to the feminist interpretations it has enjoyed.<sup>10</sup> The book's focus on the inner life of a woman, and so on the specific shape and content of feminine experience, enfold the demand that that experience receive its due. The world as women know it is to be explored and valued on its own terms, in defiance of the misogynist reductions to which contemporary moralists like Jean de La Bruyère or Nicolas Boileau subjected it.<sup>11</sup> The theme extends to the book's detailed exploration of the mother-daughter relationship and the role maternal education plays in preparing girls for the patriarchal world in which they will have to live. *La Princesse de Clèves* has thereby become a companion not only to the exaltation of feminine sensibility in seventeenth-century romance but also to the letters of Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, marquise de Sévigné. Of particular importance here is the inexhaustible flood

of letters Sévigné sent her distant daughter, painting *à son insu* a portrait of the oppressively overwrought bonds mothers and daughters could form in large part owing to the drastically straitened scope for active self-realization that society imposed on women.<sup>12</sup>

In all of these ways then *La Princesse de Clèves* is a modern novel: an attempt to represent the world as it is not only by subjecting it to rigorously realistic modes of description but also by using that realism to bring out realms of experience hitherto devalued and marginalized. In attaching itself to the sentimental adventures of a girl of sixteen, brought to court to be bound in marriage to a man she cannot choose for herself, and confined to the role of an aristocratic wife whose whole business is to honour her husband and seek the inner “repose” of a blameless life (260), the *Princesse* operates a dramatic shift in perspective in which the world is shown anew, and so more accurately than before. It is indeed a magnificent example of novelistic technique as the great Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky defines it: an art of radical “defamiliarization” aimed at “deautomatizing” our vision of reality.<sup>13</sup> In coming to feel for the novel’s heroine, responding to her private joys and sorrows as our own, we learn to see the world through her eyes, an experience capable of rousing even men from the dogmatic slumber of male privilege and prejudice.

Still, the moment we grant the book’s status as a novel, a question arises. Why was it chiefly famous in its own day for having provoked a heated public controversy that called into doubt the realism on which its claims to novelhood hinge?

A major focus of the debate was the confession noted above. Aware of her powerlessness in the face of her growing passion for the duc de Nemours, the heroine tries to enlist her husband’s help by confessing her love without revealing its object’s name. Lafayette’s leading critic was Mme de Sévigné’s cousin, Roger de Rabutin, comte de Bussy, author of the *Histoire amoureuse des Gaules* (1665), a collection of *historiettes à clé* retailing the sexual adventures of female citizens of the *beau monde*. Bussy found the heroine’s confession an “extravagant” departure from the norms of human conduct that denied the novel all plausibility, or *vraisemblance*. His core argument amounted to citing the plain evidence of everyday life. No such proceeding had ever been seen or heard of, especially not on the part of a member of the royal court like Lafayette’s princess. It was therefore inherently improbable, and so unconvincing, to the detriment of faith in the book as a whole.<sup>14</sup>

True, as we have observed elsewhere, what counted as *vraisemblable* at the time was no simple matter. In particular, it was not solely defined by the empirical calculus of probabilities Bussy invoked. Consider the testimony of an earlier literary controversy, the “quarrel” surrounding Pierre Corneille’s *Le Cid* of 1637. The issue in this case was the heroine Chimène’s love for the man who

kills her father in a duel. Chimène's love for Rodrigue, the "Cid" of the play's title and national hero of Spain, not only survives the deed but grows more ardent in view of what she acknowledges to be the noble motive behind it: that of avenging the insult his own father had received at the hands of Chimène's, thereby proving himself worthy of the love hero and heroine share.

Corneille's critics held that Chimène's ongoing passion was thoroughly *invraisemblable*. They did so however not because it was judged to be inherently impossible or even unlikely in real life. On the contrary, it was a matter of public record that the historical figure on whom Chimène's role was based had in fact married her father's killer, implying in the process that she loved him, as her status as wife in any case required. The alleged *invraisemblance* was, rather, a point of literary convention. Whatever its historical sources might indicate, *Le Cid* was a "tragi-comedy" obliged as such to present characters whose nobility prohibited them from behaving in the way ordinary people do. As the heroine of a *tragédie héroïque*, Chimène could not love her father's murderer and remain worthy of the part assigned her.<sup>15</sup>

Similar ambiguities surrounded *La Princesse de Clèves*. Perhaps the clearest statement is found in Valincour's *Lettres à la marquise de \*\*\* sur La Princesse de Clèves* (1678). As Valincour repeatedly pointed out, the *Princesse* is above all a fiction. For all the accuracy of the historical information paraded in the book's opening pages, and despite its confinement to the *beau monde* with which the book's readers were presumed to be familiar, its status as fiction bound it to the same laws as the grandest epic poem or most towering tragedy. Given its serious tone, ending not only in the death of the princess's husband but in the heroine's self-abnegating renunciation of a love she is now free to embrace, the novel is not about the world as it is; it is instead about the world as it ought to be if its goal is in fact to impart the sort of pleasure readers expect.<sup>16</sup> Yet the distinction Valincour drew between history and fiction in part in order to defend the confession scene from Bussy's criticism reaffirmed the realism the scene deprecates. For the *Princesse* belongs to a specific type of fiction: the *nouvelle*, a kind of story identified from Boccaccio on with events at least arguably circumscribed by the probabilities of everyday life. The "quarrel" of the *Princesse* was finally internal to the doctrine of *vraisemblance* itself. The scruples raised concerning the confession scene and the heroine's act of renunciation in the denouement revealed a deep fault line in period taste and thought – the tension between "ought" and "is" in which the latter term was gaining the upper hand.

Lafayette was caught between two sets of incompatible demands, both of them couched in the idiom of verisimilitude. On the one hand is the ought of fiction and pleasure Valincour defends, what readers look for in works of imagination rather than history. But on the other is realism in the most down-to-earth,



practical sense. The latter principle underlies the mutual recriminations in which husband and wife engage in trying to figure out which of them betrayed the secret of the princess's confession. As the prince objects to his wife's denial of having divulged the secret, "It is more *vraisemblable* that it be through you rather than me that this secret escaped," to which she demands in reply, "How can you suspect me of doing so? If I was capable of speaking with you, how could I speak to someone else?" (367–8). The same principle also convinces M de Clèves of his wife's infidelity when the spy he sends to shadow his rival's movements informs him that Nemours entered the garden of his country estate on two successive nights while the princess was there. The realist calculus of probabilities is even doubly implicated on this occasion since, caught on the wrong side of the protective palisade Nemours scales to enter the pavilion, the prince's spy does not actually observe what happens in the garden. The husband's conviction is entirely a matter of conjecture based on worldly likelihood. As he replies from his deathbed to his wife's protestations of innocence, what else is he to believe given the time of night, the site's isolation, and his knowledge that Nemours is the man she loves? It is all well and good to insist, as the princess does, that "the truth easily convinces us even when it is *invraisemblable*" (396). The blow to his heart kills the poor man just the same.

Lafayette's predicament is often put down to the conflict between the emergent culture of the novel and the residual cult of romance: between the nascent genre she helped refine by granting it a psychological depth absent from her immediate realist predecessors and monuments of aristocratic romanticism like Scudéry's *Clélie*.

As noted earlier, the *Princesse's* debt to romance is obvious. No one in the novel except the princess wholly measures up to the standard of amorous delicacy the cult of romantic *préciosité* set. And the princess herself is shown to feel love's physical nature with far greater candour and intensity than her romantic sisters. We accordingly get the wonderful episode in which the heroine and Nemours find a blameless pretext to join together in forging a replacement for a lost letter needed to spare her uncle acute social embarrassment (344–6). Though her husband is present throughout and no overtly criminal token of love escapes, the princess displays an *enjouement*, a glowing animal energy, whose sexual basis is unmistakable. Indeed, the scene's immediate aftermath is the shock with which she grasps for the first time just how deeply passion grips her, a realization that determines her sudden departure from the court in search of rural seclusion that ultimately brings on the confession she hopes will save her (346–8).

There is also the famous scene of the heroine's erotic reverie. Having withdrawn to the countryside in order to avoid meeting her beloved in the flesh,

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the princess retires to the salon in the pavilion she and her husband have had constructed for their country pleasures. Wrongly believing herself unobserved, since Nemours in fact watches from the next room, she lies on a divan, gazing in the direction of a painting representing a siege in which her lover took illustrious part. While thus occupied, she winds ribbons of the colours the duke wore in a tournament as a cipher in her honour around a cane that once belonged to him. She then rises from her divan in order to study the portrait of Nemours in the painting "with an attention and a dreaminess that passion alone can give" (386).

To all of which the novel adds its already-noted contributions to the *casuistique de l'amour*, and perhaps especially to the analysis of love's mystery. The question is framed in terms of the heroine's inability to explain to herself, let alone anyone else, just why she loves Nemours and cannot love her husband. The novel offers a variety of reasons for loving Nemours. The first time the duke is mentioned, we are told that he was

a masterpiece of nature, and what was least admirable in him was the fact of being the most well-built and the most handsome man in the world. What set him above all others was his incomparable valour, an attractiveness of mind, of face, and of action that people had never seen but in him alone. He had a playful energy (*enjouement*) that pleased men and women alike, extraordinary address in all exercises of physical skill, an inimitable manner of dressing that was invariably, and vainly, followed by everyone else. And there was finally, about his whole person, an air that meant that people only had eyes for him wherever he appeared. (256)

Nemours is then the personification of courtly *sprezzatura*, the *je ne sais quoi* of good looks, wit, style, charm, and taste. And yet the many reasons the princess has for falling in love with him do not in the end account for very much, especially on the score of her failure to love where morality and propriety say she should. As her uncle, the vidame de Chartres, puts it to Nemours when trying to explain why he has committed the quite literally criminal folly of continuing an affair with one woman while initiating another with no less a personage than the queen, "l'on n'est pas amoureux par sa volonté" (335). We do not choose to love where we do. If we did, it would not be the passion the beloved inspires.

Nevertheless, morality and propriety are scrupulously observed throughout. The novel's central characters manage to behave beautifully in Henry James's sense of the word, wrestling with complex moral quandaries and powerfully conflicting emotions while maintaining impossibly exacting standards of speech and deportment. There is of course the unfortunate business of Nemours's "imprudence" in divulging the secret of the heroine's confession to a friend (355), as

too the unseemly eavesdropping that enabled him to overhear it. Still, despite his notoriety as a womanizer, known, and even admired, for his skill at conducting several love affairs at once, his passion for Mme de Clèves chastens him. He remains strictly faithful to her, prompting a lot of court gossip while never once revealing the identity of the woman whose charms have captured his attentions. The betrayal of the secret is thus the exception to the rule of a moral commitment, and moral taste, wholly foreign to the society in which both he and his beloved move. The duke's otherwise blameless conduct foreshadows the subsequent exercise of moral taste that mandates the heroine's climactic renunciation. The sole act of love the princess can permit herself while remaining true to her decorous nature is the one in which she expresses her passion to its object only to abjure its consummation.

Much of this is cultural construction, a model for self-fashioning on the part of a social caste that, for all its wealth and privilege, increasingly felt threatened. The major goal of the culture of *préciosité* Lafayette's novel simultaneously elevates and challenges, like that of the doctrine of taste for which it helped lay the foundations, was to add a polish to social existence that enabled true nobles, those "of the sword" identified, like Lafayette herself, by birthright, to distinguish themselves from the upstart lookalikes on whom they nonetheless depended: the *noblesse de robe* recruited from the ranks of jurists, bankers, and state bureaucrats who effectively conducted national affairs.<sup>17</sup> The novel's cast of characters is severely restricted to members of the royal court, so much so that only one brief speaking part goes to someone of less than noble birth, the nameless "gentleman" M de Clèves uses as a spy on Nemours's approach to his wife in the scene of erotic reverie. The fact that the spy is a mere gentleman already hints at how precarious the nobility's situation has become. *Bienséance* dictates that only someone of that sort could be asked to perform so odious a task. But the job still needs to be done, however distasteful the upshot proves to be.

A similar lesson may be drawn from the novel's historical introduction. As we have noted, in setting the action at the court of Henri II around the time of the king's death in 1559, the book puts it on the eve of the Conspiracy of Amboise with which nearly four decades of vicious civil strife began. The French civil wars of the later sixteenth century were at least nominally wars of religion, pitting Protestants against Catholics in a series of sieges, pitched battles, and massacres that the Crown vainly struggled to end, in part because it was always unsure on which side it belonged. Royal uncertainty stemmed from the fact that the conflict's deepest motives were social and political rather than religious. Like the Fronde of Lafayette's own era, during which she stood with intimate friends like La Rochefoucauld on the side of "the princes," espousing

the cause of feudal resistance to absolutist rule, the civil wars were at bottom a triangular affair. Three parties fought for supremacy: the Crown, intent on asserting central authority over the nation as a whole, including the traditional *noblesse d'épée*; the nobility, whose fanatical embrace of Catholic orthodoxy was in large part a cover for the political ambitions Lafayette's narrator assigns its leaders, the duc de Guise and cardinal de Lorraine; and members of the *parlements* and professions, a great many of whom were Huguenots whose faith legitimized a desire for social and political advancement that the leaders of the Catholic League furiously resented. Confined as we have seen to the *beau monde* of the royal court, and to matters of amorous refinement whose social exclusiveness is just as marked, the novel affords no room for the third of the three corners engaged in the coming hostilities. But, like the spy the prince de Clèves dispatches on Nemours's traces, *la roture* remains in evidence, shoring up the social order over which the court presides.

Not that Lafayette is in the least interested in or even aware of the ways in which social pressure from below registers in her book. On the contrary, *La Princesse de Clèves* offers a case study in the workings of what Fredric Jameson has called the "political unconscious."<sup>18</sup> Everything in the handling of Lafayette's fiction erects symbolic social structures in which we retrospectively discern the real-world tensions the novel studiously represses. For the essence of the things we repress is that they always return at just those points where they have been most vigorously erased.

A rich example, deftly analysed by Stéphane Lojkin, is the careful stage management of the confession scene, the simultaneously symbolic and physical layout that both gives the scene its shape and makes the actions it describes possible, thereby determining how and in what it may be said to have meaning.<sup>19</sup> Lafayette takes great pains to set the stage. In the gardens of the chateau that M and Mme de Clèves have constructed for their rural pursuits stands a pavilion. Giving off the central salon where guests are received is a small study, with windows opening on flowerbeds. In his effort to make contact with the princess, Nemours has climbed in through one of these windows, only to discover husband and wife engaged in earnest conversation in the room beyond. Thus, even before their conversation turns to the confession that is the scene's chief incident and ornament, physical space has been organized in such a way as to ensure that it is overheard by the one person from whom it is most meant to be kept secret (348–9). The novel produces a layered framing effect we need to factor in if we are to understand not just what happens but further, as the sociologist Erving Goffman puts it in his analysis of the social role of frames like this, what is really going on. The episode's true content is revealed neither

to the married pair nor to the eavesdropper hidden in the adjoining room but only to the narrator and ourselves as readers.<sup>20</sup>

The thing is, though, that the series of frames that enables us to make out what is really going on does not end where the text encourages us to imagine: with the outer frame formed by the study in which Nemours hides, or even in the imaginary space that readers and narrator share. For a start, there is the garden and forest that surround the pavilion, and the chateau to which the servants have presumably been sent to allow the prince and princess to speak openly. Moreover, these implicit outer frames, together with the physical as well as socially inflected features that compose them, figure prominently elsewhere in the narrative. When Nemours returns to witness the reverie scene, the spy who shadows his movements watches from beyond the palisade that the duke scales to gain entrance to the chateau grounds (385). And when alerted to the duke's presence by the commotion caused by the sudden spasm of emotion with which he grasps the tenor of the heroine's activity, she flees to the servants in an adjacent room and asks to be conducted safely back to the chateau (387).

The fact that the confession scene restricts our perspective to the two-room arrangement Lojkin admires leaves everything else tacitly in place, and in particular the entourage formed by the heroine's servants, the people nobles call *nos gens*, whose constant attendance is a given no less pronounced for going almost entirely unmentioned. A big problem for the main characters throughout the book, and for the princess most of all, is how difficult it is to be alone. Unless ill, as the princess frequently professes to be to justify withdrawing to her private chamber, special dispositions have to be taken to secure the solitude the rituals of daily life pre-empt. The main characters are almost never alone, even when not at court. For servants are there, waiting on their orders, with eyes and ears as fatal to their peace of mind as those of the social peers from whom they ceaselessly strive to conceal their true feelings.

The problem of solitude brings us to a major ingredient of the novel: the degree to which the central characters' status as courtiers consigns them to an observational space reminiscent of the panopticon of Michel Foucault's worst nightmares of disciplinary surveillance.<sup>21</sup> The novel is justly famous for the dramatic effects it derives from the constant supervision to which courtiers are exposed.<sup>22</sup> A pervasive theme of social relationship in the book is the voracious curiosity with which they spy out each other's secret doings and emotions. As Goffman notes, keen interest in ferreting out what other people are up to is a constant of social experience: we both desire and need to know what our companions think, do, and feel in order to grasp what is really going on. This means however that we often need to keep secrets to avoid exposure, embarrassment,

or outright disaster. What is true in general is all the more relentlessly so in a world like that of the court the novel describes, a grumbling hive of amorous and political intrigue in which secrets are the coin of the realm. The merest stammer or blush is enough to wreak havoc in people's public as well as private lives. Whence the already noted frequency with which Mme de Clèves pretends illness in order to retire from a public scene to which her place in the social order nonetheless calls her. Attendance at court is not just a privilege; it is a duty integral to noble rank. To be a princess is, willy-nilly, to be a public personality compelled to endure the pitiless limelight of court life.

The deepest point though, to which mention of Jameson's theory of the political unconscious directs our attention, is the utter contingency of this state of affairs. It is a byproduct of the factitious social order court life epitomizes. The intensity with which the novel explores the hidden movements of its central characters' psychic lives is the obverse of everything from which it withholds our notice. It is remarkable, for instance, that, until she confesses her love to her husband and the pair of interviews she has with Nemours following her husband's death, the only confidant the princess has is her mother. Not only is she bereft of a true bosom friend, the nearest candidate for this role being the unscrupulous *reine dauphine*, whose exclusive interest is court gossip and the political uses to which she puts it in her duel with the queen and queen mother; the princess does not even have a governess or lady's maid of the sort for which *nouvelles*, romances, and even tragedy provide ready precedents. It is then not just that the need to keep secrets is a direct consequence of life in the gilded cage courtiers inhabit. Lafayette has made it a matter of aesthetic policy that excludes any sort of perspective from outside or below as unworthy.

This curious isolationism extends to the basic vocabulary used to denote and describe people themselves. The tone is rigorously courtly throughout. True, the courtly tone in part reflects the novel's romance dimension, an idealism it retains even as it plumbs the psychological depths. But there are many other things, more specifically bodily things, the novel never mentions. In addition to studiously avoiding the verbal intimacy of given names and the second person singular, people do not eat, defecate, or (except when tormented by jealousy) sleep. They do dance, play tennis, and joust; but, even in the case of the mortal wound the king receives, they do not tire, sweat, breathe heavily, or bleed.

Above all, the characters in the novel never have sex, leaving us wondering just what constitutes the possession the prince enjoys by right of marriage. Not that Lafayette is unaware of sexual matters. In the posthumous *nouvelle historique*, the *Comtesse de Tende* (1718), we get the stunning scene in which the heroine's husband mistakes his wife's tears at finding herself impregnated by her absent lover for tokens of her sorrow at the civil conflict then wracking France.

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To buck her up, he recounts her lover's glorious death in combat as an example of the nobility even the evils of civil war cannot extinguish.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Mitchell Greenberg has pointed out how Lafayette and La Rochefoucauld enjoyed egging on a notorious cross-dresser of their acquaintance, teasingly urging him to indulge his solitary vice to his heart's content.<sup>24</sup> The novel itself makes it obvious, moreover, that sex does happen in the *beau monde* even if everyone, the narrator included, is too well-bred to call it by its name. Still, we learn of sexual behaviour only by implication – as being, for instance, what the queen expects from the vidame in making him her intimate friend, or by metonymic displacement in the form of the fetishes the princess plays with in the reverie scene.

The concomitant of all this reticence is a drastic narrowing of the novel's ethnographic scope. The only real people in the book are those the narrator systematically calls *personnes*; and such persons as it cites are exclusively recruited from those of noble rank.

It is worth looking closely at how the word *personne* is used in the text. By my count, the word appears, in the singular and plural, 145 times (see Appendix). Forty of these, usually in negative constructions, are pronouns, the French equivalent of the English “no one,” “nobody,” or “anybody.” Twelve are used to denote “people” of both sexes, as for example when we learn that “persons” born in Italy typically have jealous natures (335) or when the king commands that stands be erected to accommodate “persons” from lower orders of society at a tournament (321). To these cases we may add 4 in which the term designates the king's public embodiment of the office he holds, as when someone is summoned to attend on him (256) or we are told that the sovereign won the Battle of Renty “in person” (258). And then there are 46 occasions on which the term singles some specific individual out from everyone else as being the person some other character has in mind or who is responsible for some particular action.

The most interesting cases, however, are the remaining 43 – together with those instances, discussed in the Appendix, in which it proves difficult to determine whether the term refers to people as an expression of personal identity or as a function of some other quality they possess. The 43 uses in question here fall into two distinct categories. In the first of these, 12 cases focus on personal appearance and demeanour. It is in this sense that we are told that the *maréchal de Saint-André* was as distinguished for his “person” as for his merit (258); and it is in the same sense that the prince de Clèves praises the unknown beauty he meets at the Italian jeweller's for the “charms of [her] person” (271). Meanwhile, in the second group, we find 31 cases in which the term serves as a politely disembodied synonym for women. This is clearly the use to which the *reine dauphine* puts it in commanding that miniature portraits be composed

“de toutes les belles personnes de la cour” (317). But it is especially marked in the case of the heroine herself. The narrator never refers to her as *une femme* in the sense of “woman” as opposed to “wife” except on that one occasion, to be discussed in a moment, where it appears in the heroine’s private ruminations on the moral taint she has suffered in falling in love with a man like Nemours.

As this counter-example suggests, the novel does resort from time to time to alternatives to the word *personne*. Servants, for example, are never persons, only *nos gens*. Nor is the term applied either to the nameless gentleman who spies on Nemours’s visit to the pavilion or to the equally nameless lower-class mistress the vidame maintains even as he strings a noble mistress along. The novel also speaks now and then of “men” and “women.” When it does so, however, it is almost invariably with some more or less pejorative connotation. A particularly striking example comes in the immediate aftermath of a painful exchange between M and Mme de Clèves in which he tries to force her to admit that the man she loves is Nemours. Aware now that it was in fact Nemours who had divulged the secret of her confession, she reproaches herself for her weakness in loving him: “It was however for this man (*homme*), whom I believed so different from all other men (*du reste des hommes*), that I find myself like other women (*les autres femmes*) while so little resembling them” (370). By divulging the secret, Nemours has shown himself to be a man like any other: vain, venal, brutal, insensitive – in a word, a cad. This in turn puts her in the position of looking like a woman like any other, a realization that not only pains but angers her. For she is emphatically not like any other woman and resents the imputation.

Except then when they behave badly, falling short of the moral standard their claim to nobility sets, people in the *Princesse*, that is to say the nobles from whom it draws all of its both primary and secondary roles, are or have distinctive “persons” in one of the two senses just noted. The first thing that emerges from this survey is accordingly that the term “person” is implicitly honorific. This is not simply a matter of *usage précieux*, steering attention away from the messiness of human biology and the crude ills and desires that attend it. It is a reflex of the social exclusivity that dominates the book. Unlike the anonymous gentleman, bourgeois mistress, or servants, all of the characters in the novel have names, which means that each of them “is somebody” in the strongest sense. The threshold of visibility in the novel is thus set at that point where physical person rises to the level of social persona. To be in *La Princesse de Clèves* is to be a “person” in the representational as well as physical or characterological sense. Whence the frequency with which “person” as character or identity is entangled with “person” as demeanour, bearing, or physical appearance. Like the generic “men” of Mme de Clèves’s rueful ruminations, characters

do at times descend to the level of lawless brutes insensitive to the demands of decorum, discretion, and honour. Persons in the novel are nonetheless self-fashioning works of moral as well as aesthetic art, overcoming the contingent physicality of their biological natures.

But whence too the term's strongly gendered quality, as a telltale euphemism for what the heroine at one point describes as "persons of my sex" (404). Women – that is to say women of rank – may be young or beautiful, given to flirting or scheming, and even disturbingly superannuated, as in the cases of the royal mistress Mme de Valentinois or the infatuated queen. They are however systematically called "persons," so much so as to make it hard on many occasions to decide whether a given use denotes a person in the ordinary general sense or, precisely, a woman.

And yet even as the term elevates those characters whose noble birth releases them from the condition of mute physicality assigned non-persons of the common sort, it also undermines the distinction. For as instanced by the close connection to physical appearance and social deportment as well as to the female gender, it exerts a feminizing effect most visible in its deployment as a euphemism for women. We encounter here a fact of courtly life whose emasculating potential for the men involved produces the telltale male "performance anxiety" that is a major theme in Harry Berger's *Absence of Grace*, on early modern conduct manuals.<sup>25</sup>

A notorious feature of the early modern gender regime is the objectification of the female. As we have seen, much of the dramatic energy in *La Princesse de Clèves* stems from the way it challenges this regime by adopting the deautomatizing perspective of its young heroine. Nevertheless, much of what is brought to oppositional light by this means is the objectification the novel denounces. We find the process at work as early as the scene at the Italian jeweller's where the prince de Clèves first catches sight of his bride-to-be. Dumbstruck by the girl's beauty, and astonished to discover someone of such obviously high social standing hitherto wholly unknown to him, the prince stares at her in wonder – so much so that he causes her to blush and beat a hasty retreat. In the debate the novel provoked, Valincour complained that the heroine's discomfiture is implausible. As he sees it, even a girl of sixteen should have the breeding required to manage a situation like this, and even enjoy the experience.<sup>26</sup> The novel's founding premise however, as the heroine herself reflects in the passage of rueful rumination cited a moment ago, is that the heroine is just not a conventionally well-bred girl. Her mother has, after all, raised her in the country, far from court, to shelter her from the corrupting influences Valincour takes for granted. This is indeed part of the work of defamiliarization the novel undertakes. Precisely because the heroine is unlike the general run of young ladies,

the experience of being openly stared at in public is entirely new to her. The scene thus challenges the objectification that Valincour takes to be a mere (and natural) fact of life.

Still, what is true of the heroine in the scene at the Italian jeweller's is true of everyone else in the novel, including men. Men are more often on the giving rather than the receiving end of the transaction. They also enjoy far greater freedom of movement and a much wider sphere of initiative. If Nemours, for instance, is safely away from court when the heroine arrives, thereby ensuring her unlucky marriage to M de Clèves before hero and heroine meet, it is because he is abroad on a diplomatic mission to secure the hand of the English queen. Still, as Nemours's role as bait in French negotiations with Elizabeth indicates, he too is a hostage of good looks and noble reputation, a counter in dynastic politics from which he extricates himself only with great difficulty (282–3).

Or consider the plight of the heroine's uncle, the vidame de Chartres. The only real gift the vidame seems to possess is that of being charming and handsome. This gift makes him the target of the longings of the lonely queen, a hot-blooded Italian lady of a certain age, surrounded by political enemies and alienated from her royal husband's affections by his all-powerful *maîtresse en titre*. The vidame proves as feckless as he is ambitious. He accedes to the queen's invitation while maintaining his liaison with another lady, and is finally punished for it. To be sure, as a male, he is normally entitled to engage in multiple amorous adventures. But, as the tragic experience of M de Clèves's friend Sancerre further reminds us, torn between violently conflicting emotions when he discovers that he has been betrayed only after his mistress's sudden, untimely death, leaving him no avenue for revenge, women can play this game too. As Roland Barthes remarks of the characters in Racinian tragedy, gender is often a relational rather than a biological condition.<sup>27</sup> Depending on circumstances, men are as vulnerable to sexual predation as the women on whom they prey.

The privilege of personhood as the novel imagines it accordingly comes at a price. It puts those who enjoy it at the mercy of the events over which it appears to grant them some measure of control. We return at this point to the lesson taught by the care with which the narrator defines the story's historical setting. By synchronizing the heroine's fateful arrival at court with Henri II's death, the novel casts events under the shadow of impending civil war. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the book is thus the way in which the basic category it uses to define characters' mode of existence, the notion of person that sets them off as being worthy of commiserating interest, makes them passive victims of the forces their own actions unleash.

On the one hand, we can interpret this feature as an expression of the Jansenistic pessimism Lafayette evidently shared with her friend and lover La Rochefoucauld, a defeated *frondeur* condemned to survive into the heyday of Ludovican absolutism as a prisoner of the court of Versailles. But, by the same token, it also expresses the stark realism that makes the book a novel rather than a romance. From this standpoint, the princess stands at the head of the long line of heroically unhappy women so central to the modern novel's main line of development.<sup>28</sup> We have already mentioned parallels with the work of Henry James: *La Princesse de Clèves* anticipates the *Portrait of a Lady*. But Lafayette's heroine also foreshadows Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina or George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke, and even the Emma of Gustave Flaubert's mock-heroic *Madame Bovary*. The last named is perhaps the most apposite given the way in which the illusions Emma derives from her avid reading of romantic fiction crosses with what contemporary readers made not only of Scudéry's *Clélie* but also of *Don Quixote* (1615). Realism in the novel has from the first defined itself in opposition to the horizons of expectation and illusion its characters bring into the world. The real is what just happens, at once despite and because of the finally fanciful demands we make on society and the people with whom we share it.<sup>29</sup> If then the *Princesse* is truly a novel, it is not just thanks to the unwonted psychological depth it brings to portraying its heroine's experience. It is also due to the fact that things end badly, and inevitably so.

All of which returns us to this chapter's central question. Why is it that this prototype of the modern psychological novel was chiefly known in its own day for the debate it provoked on the score of verisimilitude? We are now in a position to suggest an answer. The reason lies in the role played by the notion of person by which it is shaped, and by the antinomies that notion enfolds. Like Bussy and Valincour before us, we tend to mistake the true goal of Lafayette's enterprise, and we do so precisely on the grounds of the picture of person it sets forth. The ruling concept of person in the book is not based on observed and so empirically real human behaviour, the yardstick Bussy applies in declaring the heroine's conduct *invraisemblable*. But neither is it the one at work in the romances from which all of Lafayette's writings powerfully deviate. It derives rather from the heroic tragedies of Corneille, and above all from that poet's greatest popular triumph, *Le Cid*.

Like Corneille's Chimène, Lafayette's princess sacrifices hyperbolically passionate love for the hero to a higher sense of duty and self-worth. What is more, as in Corneille, the notion of person the heroine champions is radically experimental in something like the modern sense of the term. In place of the fantasy woman of romance we get a figure of flesh and blood who struggles and suffers

with deep psychic intensity. And the world she inhabits is not the frivolous wonderland mapped in Scudéry's famous "Carte de Tendre." It unfolds in a landscape darkened by ambition and violence, by sin, crime, and politics. And yet the heroine is not modelled on the disenchanted opposite of the ladies of romance – the infanticidal title character of Corneille's *Medea* (1636) or the murderous Cleopatra of his later *Rodogune* (1645). She is instead, like Chimène, the embodiment of an ideal, unparalleled in real experience, to which the novel sets itself the task of giving an experimental shape.

As we recalled earlier, *Le Cid* provoked a lively controversy of its own, a core element of which was doubt about the *vraisemblance* of Chimène's passion for her father's killer. The leading theme in the debate was how to reconcile Chimène's love as a matter of historical fact with her status as a tragic heroine. While the historical woman on whom she is based did marry, and so love, her father's murderer, such conduct was deemed unseemly and thus implausible for the dramatic role she plays. Corneille was criticized for failing to respect the rules of ordinary verisimilitude – in particular, by stuffing two duels, two trials, a Moorish invasion, and the pitched battle that drives the invaders off within the limits of a single natural day. But he was also expected to observe the decorum of the heroine's place in the social and aesthetic order of his time.

In defending the play against the charges of improbability directed specifically at Chimène, Corneille coined a new category of dramatic verisimilitude: *vraisemblance extraordinaire*.<sup>30</sup> The playwright's aim is less to produce characters who conform to the canons of ordinary psychological plausibility than to contrive the means to persuade audiences that the truly exceptional beings he puts onstage could genuinely exist in the debased world on which those canons are based. Chimène will in fact marry her father's killer; and she will do so not only in conformity with the historical facts of the matter but also for reasons of state, as being the only way of ensuring the political survival of the kingdom of Castile, riven by the civil strife ignited by the duel in which her father dies. However, Corneille directs all the resources of his art to making her perform this task in such a way as not only to preserve but also to heighten her moral and aesthetic integrity as a tragic heroine. For the fact is that she really does love Rodrigue, body and soul; and she does so with all the greater intensity when, obedient to his own duty as a lover as well as loyal son, Rodrigue comes to her, in act 3, scene 4, to offer his life to avenge her father's death. The fact that she refuses to take the life he offers on the grounds that, while it is her duty to seek it, it remains his to defend it, leading her to resist publicly confessing her love even beyond the end of the play, is utterly extraordinary. But if Corneille's experiment succeeds, we will nonetheless believe it to be true – as indeed the play's first audiences rapturously did.



But what is this if not a blueprint for what Lafayette undertakes? As Gérard Genette argues in a celebrated essay on the problem of “*vraisemblance* and motivation” in *Le Cid* and *La Princesse de Clèves* alike, we have a habit of judging fictional probabilities from the wrong temporal perspective. While it is true that, in real life, causes precede the effects they produce, fictions are inherently teleological in that the effect met in the denouement is in fact the “final cause” of the causes that lead up to it.<sup>31</sup> In this light, Mme de Clèves does not confess her adulterous passion to her husband because she has fallen in love with another man; she falls in love with another man in order to motivate her confession. Or again, she does not renounce her love for Nemours because her husband has died or because she believes that Nemours will ultimately prove unworthy of her; her husband dies and Nemours shows himself to be unworthy in order to motivate the heroic act of renouncing him. The point is to construct character and event in such a way as to inspire belief in acts that would be wholly incredible in everyday life. Exactly like Corneille’s *Le Cid*, Lafayette’s novel is thus an experiment designed to see if she can in fact produce the effect towards which she aims from the first.

Further, exactly as in Corneille, the ultimate goal is a moral one as unimpeachably high-minded as it is unsparingly experimental in the multifaceted sense we have explored throughout this book. The most remarkable thing about *La Princesse de Clèves* is the dual function served by the fictional events it constructs. What happens in the novel is not only the experience it both records (or invents) as the content of its heroine’s adventures. Nor is it just the second-order experience it creates for those readers who follow in her emotional wake. It is above all an experiment in our modern use of the term. The author asks a question: under what conditions might what the last line of the book pointedly identifies as the heroine’s “inimitable” moral conduct prove possible in a world where nothing of the sort has ever happened? The novel answers this question by constructing a controlled fiction of the kind natural philosophers set up to test their working hypotheses. Let us suppose, Lafayette effectively says, that a person like the princess did in fact exist. How might it work, and what would happen? And what might this in turn tell us both about the nature of our world and about the potential for good its human inhabitants possess?

It is helpful to note at this stage the testimony of one of Lafayette’s most ardent defenders in the controversy the novel aroused, Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle. In a letter published in the *Mercurie galant* in May 1678, a public periodical devoted to the cultural and intellectual news of the day, Fontenelle sings the novel’s praises. He begins however by confessing that it is odd for a man like him to write on such a matter. He was after all a “geometer,” a natural philosopher given to applying the laws of mathematics to the investigation of

natural phenomena. Philosophers of his stripe were thus unlikely to take an interest in books like Lafayette's, not least because readers like him were not normally drawn to literary refinements of the sort Lafayette trafficked in:

You will readily imagine that a geometer like me, his head full of measurements and proportions, wouldn't abandon his *Euclid* to read a love story (*une Nouvelle galante*) four times running unless it had charms strong enough to be felt even by mathematicians, who are perhaps those people on whom beauties of this kind are likely too subtle and too delicate to make the least impression.<sup>32</sup>

Fontenelle does not go on to say much to any great purpose about the question of verisimilitude in dispute. Nevertheless, as David Sedley observes, he does perform a valuable service in drawing attention to something "mathematical" in the book that integrally contributes to its artistic character.<sup>33</sup>

In trying to figure out what this mathematical element might be, Sedley quite naturally seeks a link between the controversy surrounding the novel and the emergent modern theory of probability. More specifically, he invokes the correspondence between Blaise Pascal and Pierre de Fermat on the "rule of points" (*la règle des partis*) designed to help gamblers decide how to distribute unplayed stakes in an interrupted game of chance based on past performance. This is a probability problem in the modern sense, for it seeks to determine the strictly mathematical chances that govern how much each player would have won had the game run its course. As such, it marks the shift away from the traditional notion of "the probable" as being a function of rhetorical authority to the kind of mathematical analysis typical today.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, as Sedley goes on to remark, the crucial version of the problem as Pascal and Fermat posed it was how to solve the relevant equation for a three-person game – the example they used to model solutions for the complexities that arise as soon as more than two players are involved. This in turn seems to echo the game the *Princesse* plays: that of the love triangle Sedley sees as offering a direct counterpart of the "arithmetical triangle" Pascal employed to get the problem straight.<sup>35</sup>

Much of Sedley's argument seems right even if I do not feel that chance plays the same role in the "rule of points" as it does in the triangle formed in Lafayette's confession scene. To cite Sedley's own probative example, while Nemours does in some sense chance to be in the next room during the confession scene, it is not the same kind of chance that governs games of chance. For in these, chance is an explicit, integral part of the phenomenon at issue. I do still generally agree that Fontenellian "geometry" plays a part in Lafayette's fiction. However, I do not believe that the mathematics of probability is either what attracted Fontenelle's attention to the book or, as Sedley goes on to claim,

that Fontenelle had it in mind when citing the *Princesse* as a model for his own *Dialogues on the Plurality of Worlds* (1686).<sup>36</sup>

The *Dialogues* present a series of fictional conversations between Fontenelle and a charming lady designed to popularize the latest developments in astronomical science; and they do undertake a chatty calculation of mathematical probabilities. Given that, as the great majority of natural philosophers had come to believe, the laws of nature are everywhere the same, and further, given that, as astronomers had successfully demonstrated, the universe is a very big place indeed, it is surely more than likely that there are worlds out there other than our own. What are the chances that there are not in fact many such worlds, given both the size of the universe and the ludicrously narrow perspective through which we gaze on the majesty of the night sky? But it is important to note that this is not just a mathematical question; it is empirical as well. For whatever the chances are that other worlds exist, we cannot know that they do so until we have in fact discovered them. The dialogues are, accordingly, an experiment. More precisely, in the absence of a means to determine the empirical fact of the matter, they are a thought experiment governed by the natural conditions known to define the direct empirical experience that would enable us to settle the issue one way or the other.<sup>37</sup>

If then Fontenelle's dialogues are in some sense modelled on the *Princesse*, it is because the novel is a thought experiment in its own right. Just as Valincour argues in trying to come to terms with the book, it is a fiction that plays with the rules of empirical probability in order to test its own controlling hypothesis. What if unparalleled virtue like Mme de Clèves's did in fact exist in a world like this one? What form would it take, and how would it come to pass?

Consider one last time the pointedly disabused historicalness of the novel's initial panorama of the French court in 1559. The narrator often lapses into polite hyperbole. "Magnificence and gallantry have never appeared in France with such éclat as in the last years of the reign of Henry the Second" (253). Or again, "Never has a court had so many beautiful persons or admirably well-made men, and it seemed that nature had taken pleasure in planting there the highest beauty she bestows on the greatest princesses and on the greatest princes" (254). As we have repeatedly seen, however, we must not overlook the historical doom that hangs over the court, or the many cynical observations Lafayette borrows from her historical sources, chief among them the dispiriting account presented in the 1665–6 edition of the memoirs of Pierre de Bourdeilles, abbé de Brantôme. While glamorous and exciting, the court is also dangerous; and many of its greatest luminaries – the duc de Guise; the *reine dauphine*, Mary Queen of Scots; and of course the king himself – are destined to suffer violent death.

But the point of all of this is less the realism to which the book owes its status as a novel than the contrast it establishes between the princess and the world she is made to inhabit for ends all Lafayette's own. The contrast is in fact established in the sentence with which the narrator first introduces the heroine, a sentence I cite in the original because so much of its impact depends on the French:

Il parut alors une beauté à la cour, qui attira les yeux de tout le monde, et l'on doit croire que c'était une beauté parfaite, puisqu'elle donna de l'admiration dans un lieu où l'on était si accoutumé à voir de belles personnes. (259–60)

[There appeared at that time (*alors*) a beauty at court, which drew everyone's eyes, and one must believe it was a perfect beauty since it aroused admiration in a place where people were so accustomed to see beautiful women (*de belles personnes*).]

As signalled by the *alors* that marks the moment at which the heroine first appears, the sentence makes the transition from the introductory description of the court to the start of the story proper. The effect produced in this way finds a striking parallel with the sentence with which René Descartes opens his relation in the autobiographical *Discourse* (1637) of the discovery of the method that made him famous:

I was at that time (*alors*) in Germany, where the occasion of the wars that have still not ended there had called me; and as I was returning to the army from the coronation of the emperor, the start of winter halted me in quarters where, finding no conversation to divert me, and having besides by good luck no cares or passions to disturb me, I remained all day shut up on my own in a heated room.<sup>38</sup>

Descartes's account of the discovery of the method is preceded by that of the education he had received at the Jesuit Collège de la Flèche, and of the disillusionment he experienced when he realized that it had supplied none of the certain knowledge his teachers had promised. He accordingly decided to quit studies altogether and go abroad as a soldier, enlisting in the imperial army at the outbreak of the Thirty Years War. The dominant tense of Descartes's autobiography to this point has been the imperfect, the continuous past of habitual events. It thus bespeaks a lack of the kind of dramatic focus we look for in the narration of events proper – the world-changing character that Alain Badiou explores with such acute (if rhetorically overblown) energy in the book he devotes to the topic.<sup>39</sup> While the lesson he drew from it was unusual, Descartes's education was typical for the times and, like the times themselves, inherently

ill-directed and, in his eyes at least, inconsequential. He had, it is true, decided that he could do worse than go to Germany in search of real-world experience, learning about life at firsthand in foreign places in order to put himself to the test of such people and encounters as he chanced to meet. But the adventures he sought stand squarely under the sign of aimless contingency, lacking the sort of logical order and rational meaning he had failed to find at school.

This defines the impact of his introductory sentence. As in Lafayette, the adverb *alors* bears heavy weight. Descartes approaches the narration of the decisive turning point in his life, the great conversion experience in which, in discovering the power of rational method systematically applied, he discovered the path he has pursued ever since. The sentence fastens then on the precise moment when the senseless because irresolvably open-ended consecutiveness of everyday life acquires the teleological directedness of a story – the story of the disciplined “search for the truth” and of the epoch-making role Descartes sees himself as playing in it. True, the onset of the episode is couched in the idiom of pure chance: he remarks how he happened to be in Germany, taking winter quarters somewhere on the road between the army and the imperial court at a moment when he had the “good luck” to find no company to distract him and no personal or financial worries to disturb his thoughts. Nevertheless, what happens next changes everything, in part because it happens with the weight of far more than mere happenstance. Even as the wars that had drawn him to Germany roll on with no end in sight, Descartes himself has embarked on the epic journey of philosophical ascent that has become his life’s work. The imperfect tense of pathless inconsequence yields to the *passé historique*, the incisive preterite of a genuine moment of truth.

The narrative structure Lafayette deploys in introducing her heroine operates to exactly similar effect. Coloured by the *alors* that marks the passage between the happenstancial “before” of everyday life and the epoch-making “after” that follows the heroine’s first appearance, the imperfect tense that dominates the introductory depiction of the court of Henri II bespeaks an aimlessly habitual past that ultimately leads nowhere. Its hold is then abruptly broken by the emergence of the absolute past of historical events – *il parut*. With this change of tense, something decisively happens, something real. And what happens comes like an apparition, the sudden, unlooked for incursion of alien beauty.

It is important to stress the note of impersonality the text strikes here. In period usage as in both French and English today, “a beauty” usually means a beautiful woman, just as the *belles personnes* at the end of the sentence are beautiful ladies. Still, the sentence is constructed in such a way as to convey a sense of the pure, unconditioned fact of beauty itself. Lafayette’s word choice invokes a quality whose frankly metaphysical character is stressed by the fact that we

are told that, despite courtiers' familiarity with the many *belles personnes* they encounter, no one has ever seen anything like it. It is not just beauty, but "perfect" beauty, an instantiation of beauty as such. Small wonder that the prince should be reduced to pure dumbstruck staring when the heroine first appears.

To which we should add the form the opening takes: "il parut alors une beauté à la cour." Not only is this a complete sentence by itself; it is an alexandrine, complete with the caesura that follows the boundary-drawing *alors*. The sentence that marks the transition from the indefinite past of life as usual to the historical mode of the *passé défini* speaks in the voice of heroic verse, the only one appropriate to the mystery it enacts. *La Princesse de Clèves* is about what it means to achieve: the advent of pure beauty in the sublunary world of debased human experience. Like the perfect virtue with which she defends not just her own honour but as it were honour itself, the moral as well as physical beauty the princess embodies does not belong to this world – it is not for nothing that she dies soon after retiring to a life of pious works at the novel's close (416). The heroine's indigestible foreignness measures the scale of Lafayette's ambition for the novel: a work of incarnation in the deepest sense whereby the ideal the princess champions is finally made real.

At the level of narrative technique, and in the finalist perspective Genette reminds us is the very element of fiction, the desire to make it real commands every step in the unfolding experiment of beauty. The heroine's foreignness is prepared by her mother's decision to raise her in the country until she reaches marriageable age, preventing her from going native in the way most *jeunes personnes* so readily do. The contrast between the heroine and ordinary girls is deepened by the education she receives at her mother's hands, filling her head with graphic pictures of the private hell to which marital infidelity leads, yet opening channels of trusting communication that set a precedent for the princess's later confession to her husband. The mother's demise follows a deathbed scene in which she tells her daughter that she has penetrated the secret of her love for Nemours. She thereby confirms the heroine's propensity to confess by leaving her alone in her hour of shame and distress. And the frenzy of jealousy the princess endures when she believes the vidame's letter belonged to Nemours teaches her the truth of her mother's warnings about the dark side of carnal passion, reinforcing the need to confess still further. By the time she makes her confession, the novel has contrived to make it seem all but inevitable, a direct consequence of the otherwise deeply realized events that have brought her to that act. And just as every twist in the story has paved the way for her confession, so too has it prepared both her and the reader for the final act of renunciation in which she abandons all thought of earthly happiness.

Whatever, in the backward-looking logic of the plot, prepares the princess for



the deeds she performs also shapes the forward-looking time of the experience of reading, fusing reader and character in the bittersweet pleasure of the novel's final pages.

During the climactic scene of renunciation, the princess replies to Nemours's objection that, now that her husband is dead, her scruples are surely baseless. She responds not by denying but by embracing their unreality: "It is true," she admits, "that I sacrifice much to a duty that only subsists in my imagination" (410). The experimental case that the novel makes is that what we are capable of imagining we are also capable of doing. Our humanity is not the prisoner of the machinery of worldly interest and desire that defines human life as we know it. It is instead possessed of an instinct for something better and higher, for something truly beautiful, beyond the reach of empirical nature. The *Princesse* is itself the work of creative imagination it commends. It may well be true that the moral beauty Mme de Clèves achieves is only possible in fiction. Still, our human openness to fiction bears witness to a sense of person as being enigmatically irreducible to the natural machinery that makes fiction such an important fact of life.

And the result is, once again, experimental in the fullest period use of the word. For Lafayette's experiment of beauty is also an experiment of person designed to help us imagine a new way of being. To the precise extent that the novel enables us to imagine ourselves as being different from what we are, it at once reveals and exploits inner resources of which we may well have been unaware. The person who imagines is already someone other than who she was – someone better, someone new. The experience of the experiment of beauty *La Princesse de Clèves* undertakes changes the order of reality.

## APPENDIX. USES OF THE TERM *PERSONNE* IN *LA PRINCESSE DE CLÈVES*

Key:

A = appearance, demeanour

ID = specific individuals

PE = people in general

PI = public identity

PR = pronoun

W = woman/women

In sorting all of the instances of the word *personne* in the novel into one of the six categories indicated above, I have often found puzzling boundary-cases. I have been led by what seemed to me to be the core thrust of a given use, as

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also by leading connotations and associated thought-trains. For instance, in item 75 below (“la passion qu’il avait pour cette personne”), the implicit question “who?” seems to take precedence over sex. By contrast, in item 79 (“je déshonore une personne qui m’a passionnément aimé”), the dishonour the character has in mind is so clearly gendered that the example warranted inclusion in the woman/women category. Readers will no doubt quarrel with some of my choices, but one aim of this appendix is to give them the tools they need to draw their own conclusions.

### 1. Instances by page number and type:

1. la politique l’obligeant d’approcher cette duchesse de sa **personne** afin d’en approcher aussi le roi (254) PI
2. Jamais cour n’a eu tant de belles **personnes** et d’hommes admirablement bien faits (254) W
3. était une **personne** parfaite pour l’esprit et pour le corps (254) ID
4. elle les aimait et s’y connaissait mieux que **personne** (254) PR
5. par la grandeur de son rang et par celle qui paraissait en sa **personne** (254) A
6. un air dans toute sa **personne** qui faisait qu’on (256) A
7. ceux que la faveur ou les offices approchaient de sa **personne** (256) PI
8. elle était maîtresse de sa **personne** et de l’État (256) ID
9. sa faveur ne tenait qu’à sa **personne**” (257) ID
10. par l’agrément de sa **personne** (258) A
11. [le roi] avait gagné en **personne** la bataille de Renty (258) PI
12. où l’on était si accoutumé à voir de belles **personnes** (260) W
13. ne parler jamais de la galanterie devant les jeunes **personnes** (260) W
14. la vertu donnait de l’éclat et de l’élévation à une **personne** qui avait de la beauté et de la naissance (260) ID
15. son visage et sa **personne** étaient pleins de grâce et de charmes (261) A
16. qui était cette belle **personne** qu’il ne connaissait point (261) W
17. ses regards l’embarrassait, contre l’habitude des jeunes **personnes** (261) W
18. et ne pouvait se lasser de donner des louanges à cette **personne** (262) W
19. il n’y avait point de **personne** comme celle qu’il dépeignait (263) ID
20. sentit la joie de voir que cette **personne**, qu’il avait trouvée si aimable, était d’une qualité proportionnée à sa beauté (263) ID
21. ne pouvait regarder favorablement une **personne** qui portait son nom (263) ID
22. [il] venait d’épouser une **personne** si proche de la maison royale (263) ID
23. **Personne** n’était tranquille (264) PR

24. très dangereuse pour une jeune **personne** (265) W
25. ils ne furent ignorés de **personne** (265) PR
26. l'élévation d'une **personne** qu'elle aimait beaucoup (267) ID
27. Les **personnes** galantes sont toujours bien aises qu'un prétexte leur donne lieu de parler à ceux qui les aiment (267) W
28. était bien fait de sa **personne** (267) A
29. **Personne** n'osait plus penser à Mlle. de Chartres (269) PR
30. de ne pas réussir auprès d'une **personne** qui avait espéré un prince du sang (269) ID
31. elle n'avait aucune inclination particulière pour sa **personne** (270) A
32. les charmes de votre **personne** (271) A
33. car jamais **personne** n'aura eu (272) PR
34. dans un temps où **personne** n'osait plus (272) PR
35. la faire paraître une **personne** où l'on ne pouvait atteindre (273) ID
36. l'air brillant qui était dans sa **personne** (274) A
37. sans donner le loisir de parler à **personne** (275) PR
38. par l'air de sa **personne** et par l'agrément de son esprit (276) A
39. Comment s'était-il attaché à une **personne** qui était beaucoup plus âgée que lui (276) W
40. elle l'eût aimé par rapport à sa seule **personne** sans intérêt de grandeur, ni de fortune (277) ID
41. lui ôta le goût et même le souvenir de toutes les **personnes** qu'il avait aimées (282) W
42. **personne** ne le soupçonna d'être amoureux (283) PR
43. elle jugeait bien le péril où était cette jeune **personne** (283) W
44. et n'avait vu **personne** (283) PR
45. il fit entrer toutes les **personnes** de qualité (284) PE
46. que d'y voir là la **personne** qu'il aime (284) ID
47. un peu négligée, comme une **personne** qui s'était trouvée mal (286) ID
48. elle savait mieux la vérité que **personne** (289) PR
49. est amoureux d'une **personne** sur qui j'ai quelque pouvoir (289) ID
50. plusieurs **personnes** de qualité (290) PE
51. c'était une des **personnes** du monde qui me plaisaient davantage (293) PE
52. la plus aimable et la plus fidèle **personne** (299) ID
53. mais qui n'ont jamais été sentis en meme temps par la même **personne** (302) ID
54. qui est la **personne** qu'il aime (304) ID
55. qui le voit de plus près que **personne** (305) PR
56. n'a point d'intelligence avec la **personne** qu'il aime (306) ID
57. le moyen de ne pas se reconnaître pour cette **personne** (306) ID

58. je suis la seule **personne** (306) ID
59. Jamais **personne** de l'âge de cette princesse n'a eu (307) PR
60. il ne reviendrait plus **personne** (308) PR
61. Il y a des **personnes** à qui on n'ose donner d'autres marques de la passion qu'on a pour elles (308) W
62. on ne veut être aimé de **personne** (308) PR
63. la **personne** du monde pour qui j'aurais la plus violente et la plus respectueuse passion (312) ID
64. avec d'autres **personnes** (313) PE
65. Jamais femme n'a eu tant d'agrément dans sa **personne** et dans son humeur (314) A
66. des portraits en petit de toutes les belles **personnes** de la cour (317) W
67. parmi tant de **personnes** qui étaient dans ce lieu (317) PE
68. il aimait la plus aimable **personne** de la cour (318) W
69. contenir un nombre infini de **personnes** (321) PE
70. quelque chose de galant qui eût rapport aux **personnes** qu'ils aimaient (321) W
71. dans l'espérance que **personne** ne s'en serait aperçu (322) PR
72. il n'y eut **personne** qui ne lui demandât (323) PR
73. Quelle vue et quelle connaissance pour une **personne** de son humeur (326) ID
74. Elle voyait, par la fin de la lettre, que cette **personne** se croyait aimée (327) ID
75. la passion qu'il avait pour cette **personne** (327) ID
76. n'était pas la seule **personne** dont cette lettre troublait le repos (328) ID
77. que **personne** ne sache (329) PR
78. qu'il n'ait **personne** avec qui (329–30) PR
79. je déshonore une **personne** qui m'a passionnément aimé (330) W
80. il n'y avait **personne** en qui elle eusse une entière confiance (330) PR
81. qu'elle n'avait trouvé **personne** en France qui eût du secret (331) PR
82. surtout pour les **personnes** de son rang (331) PE
83. vous ne vous fiez à **personne** (331) PR
84. et même des **personnes** intéressées (331) PE
85. une reine dont la **personne** est encore extrêmement aimable (333) A
86. je n'ai osé jusqu'ici me fier à **personne** (334) PR
87. La jalousie est naturelle aux **personnes** de sa nation (335) PE
88. elle s'imagina que la **personne** dont on témoigna de la jalousie était peut-être elle-même (336) ID
89. la **personne** du monde que j'aime le plus (337) ID
90. la **personne** du monde que je dois le plus craindre (337) ID

91. [il] ne pouvait supporter qu'une **personne** qu'il aimait si éperdument, eût lieu de croire qu'il eût quelque attachement pour une autre (339) ID
92. de ne laisser entrer **personne** (345) PR
93. le repos n'est guère propre pour une **personne** de votre âge (349) W
94. les périls où se trouvent quelquefois les **personnes** de mon âge (350) W
95. il était impossible d'engager une **personne** qui aurait recours à un remède si extraordinaire (355) ID
96. le plaisir d'être amoureux d'une **personne** digne d'être aimée (355) ID
97. sans lui nommer la **personne** (355) ID
98. **personne** ne s'acquitterait mieux que lui de cette commission (356) PR
99. **personne** aussi ne ferait tant d'honneur à la France (356) PR
100. faites que je ne voie **personne** (357) PR
101. trouvez bon [...] que je ne voie **personne** (357) PR
102. l'action extraordinaire de cette **personne** (361) ID
103. Il est éperdument amoureux et fort aimé d'une des plus belles **personnes** de la cour (362) W
104. elle ne croyait pas que **personne** sût qu'elle aimait ce prince (362) PR
105. la **personne** de la cour en qui elle avait le plus de confiance (364) ID
106. il ne m'a pas nommé la **personne** qu'il aime (365) ID
107. Croyez-vous [...] qu'une **personne** qui aurait une véritable passion, pût la découvrir à son mari? (365) ID
108. Cette **personne** ne connaît pas sans doute l'amour (365) ID
109. qui ne lui avait pas nommé la **personne** (367) ID
110. elle niait si fortement de s'être confiée à **personne** (368) PR
111. comme une **personne** qui a une folle et violente passion (370) ID
112. la plus aimable et la plus estimable **personne** du monde (371) ID
113. celle d'une belle **personne** qu'il avait aimée (373) W
114. des **personnes** moins intéressées (374) PE
115. **personne** ne peut m'obliger (376) PR
116. lorsqu'il [le roi] aurait besoin de ses conseils, il l'appellerait auprès de sa **personne** (378) PI
117. il ne demeura **personne** à la cour qui pût balancer le pouvoir de la maison de Guise (378) PR
118. D'une **personne** comme vous, madame, tout est des faveurs hors l'indifférence (381) ID
119. Mme de Clèves l'aimait comme une **personne** qui avait une passion aussi bien qu'elle (383) W
120. la conversation entre deux jeunes **personnes**, qui avaient des passion violentes dans le cœur (384) W
121. comme pour écouter s'il n'y entendrait **personne** (385) PR

122. une **personne** qu'il adorait (387) W
123. une **personne** à qui (387) W
124. pour n'être vu ni entendu de **personne** (388) PR
125. aimé de la plus aimable **personne** du monde (389) ID
126. sans que **personne** s'en aperçût (392) PR
127. pour la passer avec une **personne** que j'ai tant aimée (395) W
128. pour vivre séparé de cette même **personne** (385) W
129. les **personnes** raisonnables (395) PE
130. **personne** ne la voyait (398) PR
131. tous les autres qui étaient distingués par leur **personne** ou par leur mérite (399) A
132. s'il n'y avait **personne** (402) PR
133. la seule **personne** digne de lui (402) ID
134. elle ne voyait encore **personne** (403) PR
135. afin de n'être vu de **personne** (403) PR
136. **personne** ne sait que je suis ici (403) PR
137. dans les **personnes** de mon sexe (404) W
138. Mon devoir [...] me défend de penser jamais à **personne** (406) PR
139. la plus estimable **personne** du monde (407) ID
140. la seule **personne** en qui ces deux choses se sont jamais trouvées au degré qu'elles sont en vous (407) W
141. Ayez cependant le plaisir de vous être fait aimer d'une **personne** qui n'aurait rien aimé, si elle ne vous avait jamais vu (410–11) W
142. paraissent aux **personnes** qui ont des vues plus grandes et plus éloignées (415) PE
143. pour une **personne** de mérite (415) ID
144. mais cette **personne** lui dit (416) ID
145. un homme qui perdait toutes sortes d'espérances de revoir jamais une **personne** qu'il aimait d'une passion la plus violente, la plus naturelle et la mieux fondée qui ait jamais été (416) W



**2. Table of uses of the term *personne* in *La Princesse de Clèves*  
by category and item number:**

A	ID	PE	PI	PR	W
Appearance, demeanour	Specific individuals	People in general	Public identity	Pronoun	Woman/ women
5 6 10 15 28	3 8 9 19 20	45 50 51 64	1 7 11	4 23 25 29	2 12 13 14 16
31 32 36 38	21 22 26 30	67 69 82 84	116	33 34 37 42	17 18 24 27 39
65 85 131	35 40 46 47	87 114 129		44 48 55 59	41 43 61 66
	49 52 53 54	142		60 62 71 72	68 70 79 93
	56 57 58			77 78 80 81	94 103 113 119
	63 73 74 75			83 86 92 98	120 122 123
	76 88 89 90			99 100 101	127 128 137
	91 95 96			104 110 115	140 141 145
	97 102 105			117 121 124	
	106 107 108			126 130 132	
	109 111 112			134 135	
	118 125 133			136 138	
	139 143 144				

# Groping in the Dark: Aesthetics and Ontology in Diderot and Kant

The catalyst of Lafayette's triumphant experiment of beauty is the experimental person she makes her heroine. Lafayette's task is to reconcile the inimitable ideal the princess embodies with the debased world of sin and death she must nonetheless inhabit for that embodiment to take place. The intensity with which the heroine suffers the pain and guilt of carnal love makes her real in a way the heroines of romance could never be. And her reality in turn enables at least some of Lafayette's readers to imagine a way of life superior to the one we know.

And yet Lafayette's triumph also confirms the limits it has vanquished, granting them every bit as much reality as the ideal the princess defends. Pure beauty enters the world only to leave it again: the princess dies young, and the all-too-human man she loves forgets her just as she predicted. The novel does change the world by introducing the promise of transcendence for which the princess sets an example. But the world goes on just the same. The Wars of Religion will soon break out, the *Fronde des Princes* will go down to defeat, and the condition of women will remain as straitened and alienated as before. *La Princesse de Clèves* proves to this extent as insubstantial as the romances it supersedes, and as the fashionable fairy tales of Mme d'Aulnoy or Charles Perrault that initiate the long twilight of elite Ludovican culture.<sup>1</sup>

Or at least this is how it looks from the court of Versailles where, for all her daring and intelligence, Lafayette remains as captive as the aging and increasingly ill-tempered monarch she was obliged to serve. Elsewhere in Europe, and even in France, other forms of experiment move to the fore, producing different forms of personal experience all the richer for escaping the social as well as moral and affective constraints that structure Lafayette's novel. One such is of course the version of the novel from which Lafayette so strikingly deviates. Born with the picaresques of the Spanish sixteenth century, fictions like Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1615), Paul Scarron's *Le Roman comique* (1657),

Hans Jacob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus* (1668), or Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722) introduce themes, settings, and above all personalities that will frame the novelistic portrayal of self for the next three centuries and more. And with the emergence of the modern novel comes what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as the progressive "novelization" of European literary culture in all its forms: the polyphonic interweaving of deeply grounded voices, viewpoints, idioms, and character types that gives ever-wider reach and vitality to the experimental naturalism inherited from the early moderns.<sup>2</sup> The carnival Bakhtin celebrates is, to be sure, displaced by the market staged in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fayre*; and the grotesque bodies of the Battle between Carnival and Lent give way to the increasingly disciplined citizens of the modern city. Yet, as we saw in [chapter 4](#), the discipline that makes good citizens also empowers them to defy their masters in the public sphere of open political debate.<sup>3</sup>

My aim in this final chapter is explore one such alternative by returning once more to the richly telltale dialogue between philosophy and visual art with which the book largely began. My point of departure will be a classic art-historical study whose implications have still not been fully digested in the more than three decades since its publication, Michael Fried's *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*.<sup>4</sup> As his title indicates, Fried's own starting point is the emergence of what he calls an aesthetic of "absorption" in eighteenth-century France. And the key to this aesthetic is set by programmatic opposition to what Fried's chief period informant, Denis Diderot, characterized as the "theatrical" conventions of mainstream early modern art.<sup>5</sup>

In Diderot's view, shared by Fried, the masterworks of the Renaissance, baroque, and French neoclassical eras are intrinsically theatrical in that they are typically composed as an explicit expression of their address to a beholder. For example, the founding compositional principle of Pieter Paul Rubens's *Descent from the Cross* in Antwerp (1612–14; [Figure 42](#)) is not merely the dramatic visualization of a significant episode from the Passion of Christ; it is the at once poignant and ceremonial monstration of the Saviour's corpse as his intimates lower it to the ground. The painting is unmistakably baroque in its insistence on the brutal materiality conveyed by the corpse's deathly pallor, the sufferings indexed by the graphic rendering of Christ's wounds, and the sheer physical effort involved in hoisting his dead body from the cross. The dominant theme is to this extent the realism emphasized by the way the scene obtrudes into the space from which we gaze on it, breaking the picture plane to drive home the place the image demands in our own experience. The painting may even be said to obliterate its own mediating role as a picture to make us perceive Christ's death with the raw immediacy of a lived event. It seeks to precipitate the kind of

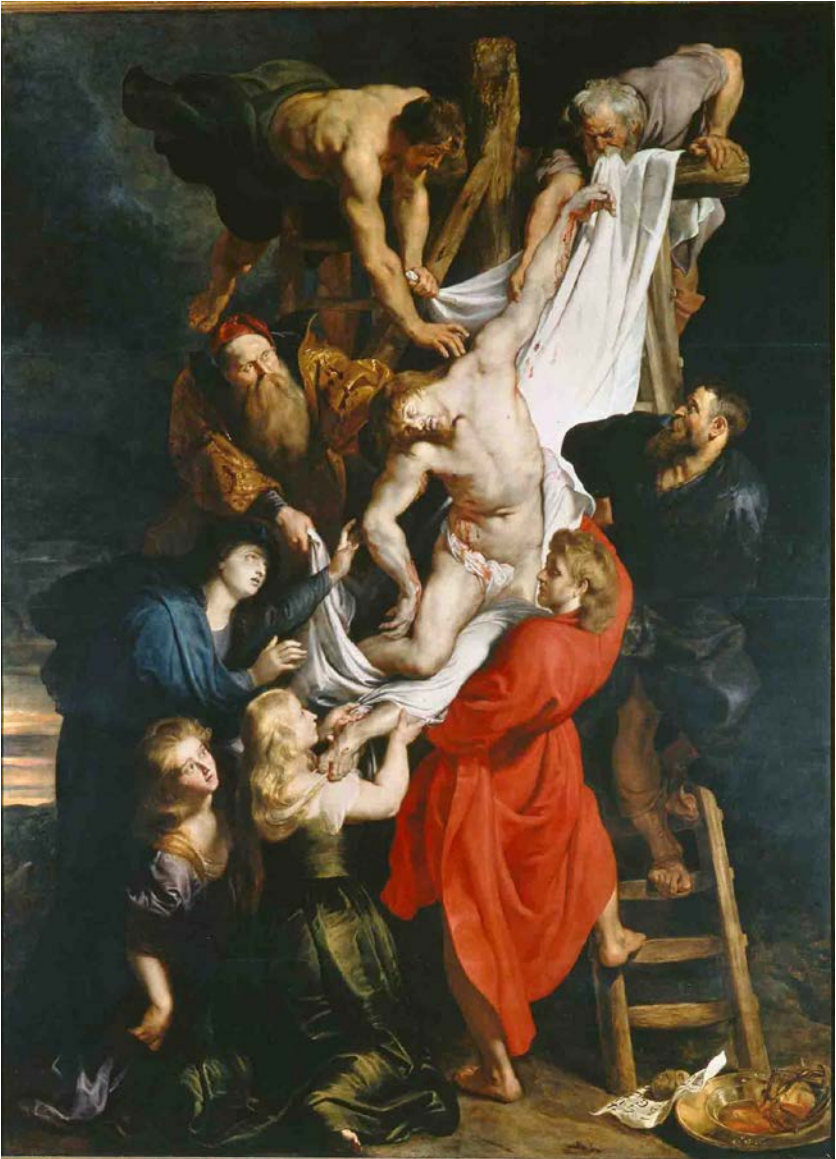


Figure 42. Pieter Paul Rubens, *Descent from the Cross* (1612–14).

Cathedral of Our Lady, Antwerp. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

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deeply personalized visual devotion incorporated in Jesuit spiritual exercises, where contemplation of the image of Christ's sufferings promotes salutary guilt for the sins his crucifixion redeemed.<sup>6</sup>

Yet the point is, precisely, to make us perceive the event this way through an act of showing underscored by an arrangement designed to ensure the corpse's unobstructed visibility at the very centre of attention. In this sense the formal principle put in play is exactly the same as in Rubens's *Presentation of the Wedding Portrait of Maria de' Medici to Henri IV* of 1622–4 (Figure 43), a painting whose nuptial gods and putti exuberantly violate – even as they are unabashedly clothed in – the naturalistic idiom the Antwerp *Descent* embraces. The allegorical “discovery” of not only the historical fact but also the moral and political salience of the dynastic union that helped end the civil wars whose ravages roil the far horizon is amplified by the angelic ostension of Maria's portrait. The act of presentation becomes a *mise-en-abyme* that, in triggering a *sprezzatura* display of courtly demonstrativeness on Henri's part (despite the wounded leg, his pose bears elegant public witness to his bride's exquisite beauty), performs in miniature the same public office as the *tableau d'apparat* that sets it forth.

By contrast, the paintings to which Diderot draws Fried's attention pointedly turn their backs on this kind of ceremonial display. True, they are often vividly dramatic and, in the process, make the same kind of moral claims. It is important moreover to emphasize Diderot's conformity to standard taste in this regard. The frequency with which he resorts to the term “poetic” as an honorific for paintings that moved him betokens his debt to the conventions of *ut pictura poesis*. So does his concomitant use of the word “portraitist” as a derogatory term to denote artists (genre, landscape, and still life as well as portrait painters proper) who merely “copy” what untutored nature sets before their eyes.<sup>7</sup> For all his novelty as a critic, Diderot remained loyal to the traditional hierarchy of genres. The pictures that won his greatest admiration were “history” paintings that tell exemplary stories in the service of some transcendent moral idea, springing from an act of free creation for which “historical” subjects were alone seen to provide sufficient imaginative scope (*Essays*, 721–6). Jean-Honoré Fragonard's *Coresus Sacrificing Himself for Callirhoe* for example (Figure 44), to which Diderot devotes a striking passage in the *Salon* of 1765 (*Salons*, 2.188–98), recounts a tragic tale from Pausanias's *Description of Greece*, where a young priest of Dionysus chooses to die in his beloved's place to cure the Bacchic frenzy that has overtaken his city in retribution for the heroine's rejection of his suit. The painting's literary source identifies it as just the sort of work in which eighteenth-century commentators like Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, Charles Batteux, or the comte de Caylus as well as Diderot himself expected to find the most satisfying aesthetic experiences just as their neoclassical forebears had.





Figure 43. Pieter Paul Rubens, *The Presentation of the Wedding Portrait of Maria de' Medici* (1622–4). Louvre, Paris. Photo: Ojeda/Le Mage. © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.

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Figure 44. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *Coresus Sacrificing Himself for Callirhoe* (1765).  
 Louvre, Paris. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

Diderot's conservatism on this score accounts for the discomfort his artistic enthusiasms sometimes cause – the difficulty we have in grasping what someone otherwise so shrewd and forward-looking could have seen in some of the paintings he championed. Fragonard's *Coresus and Callirhoe* is a case in point.<sup>8</sup> The figure of the hero is especially hard to swallow. In the *Essays on Painting* (1766), Diderot makes a remark that speaks directly to Fried's argument concerning his anti-theatrical bent: "One has yet to make, and will never make, a bearable piece of painting based on a theatrical scene; and this seems to me to be the cruelest satire against our actors, set designers, and perhaps even poets" (*Essays*, 713). If ever a picture bore this sentiment out it is this one, where the depiction of the hero's at once amorous and suicidal agitation produces a pose of comical hamminess.

The figure's histrionic telegraphy does reflect the material constraints to which all narrative paintings fall subject owing to their confinement to the static instant of a single view and the muteness to which plastic art is condemned (*Essays*, 714–15 and 719). These constraints may not explain (or excuse) Coresus's signally narcissistic self-absorption; but they do illuminate the gestural hyperbole needed to achieve clarity of expression. As Diderot writes elsewhere in the *Essays*, "Expression is weak or false when it leaves us unsure of the emotion" (698). This idea is in turn linked to the parallel between actors and painters with which he opens the discussion of painterly expression:

Expression is in general the image of a feeling.

An actor who doesn't know painting is a poor actor; a painter who is not a physiognomist is a poor painter. (*Essays*, 696)

The fact remains that, if the attitude Coresus strikes is what it takes to convey his sentiments, it is hard not to feel that those sentiments are false. Nor would the problem of expression pose itself in quite these terms were it not for the *ut pictura* taste for elevated emotion portrayed in grand operatic style to which both Fragonard and Diderot minister.

Yet as closely as Fragonard and Diderot cling to *ut pictura* norms, they diverge from them too. Though Coresus is the energetic focus of the dramatic action, dynamically displaced to the right so as to attract the rapt attention of everyone in the painting except the swooning heroine, his own eyes are firmly shut in token of his act's solipsistic interiority. The outstretched arm and graceful twist of hip and torso as he plunges the sacramental dagger into his breast betoken less the act itself than the dreamlike intensity of the passion that prompts it; and it is to this passion, espoused in all its inward-turning depth, that we are drawn, losing ourselves in quasi-oniric identification with the hero.

It is telling that Diderot frames the *Salon's* account of the picture not as a description of the painting itself but as a dream inspired by a reading of the myth of the cave in Plato's *Republic*. Casting the discussion in the form of a dialogue with his commissioning editor Friedrich Melchior Grimm, Diderot describes his experience as a fantasy modelled on the magic-lantern-like illusions projected for Plato's fettered prisoners on the cavern wall. It is left to Grimm in fact to identify the picture itself:

That's Fragonard's picture, there it is with all its effects. [...] It's the same temple, the same layout, the same personnel, the same action, the same characters, the same general interest, the same qualities, the same flaws. In the cavern, you see nothing but the simulacra of beings and, on his canvas, Fragonard too shows you

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nothing but simulacra. It's a beautiful dream you've had; it's a beautiful dream that he has painted. If one loses sight of the picture for an instant, one goes in constant fear that the canvas will curl up on itself [...] and that these sublime and intriguing phantoms will vanish just like those of the night. (*Salons*, 2.195)

The picture stages the drama of a double absorption – Coresus's in the emotions that trigger the suicidal dagger-thrust and the beholder's in sympathetic fusion with the erotic fantasy the hero enacts. This explains the ambivalence conveyed by the parallel with Plato's cave and the beholder's dreamy identification not only with the hero but, by extension, with Plato's slaves, whose fetters prevent them from turning their heads towards true sunlight. But it also explains the role the visual rhetoric of absorption plays and the concomitant rejection of explicit public address. Absorption is both the psychological state to which beholders are reduced and the means by which the painting reduces them to it. Like the witnesses assembled in the painting, eyes locked on the hero in horrified suspense, we will only respond with the rapt intensity Fragonard aims for so long as we believe in the reality of Coresus's act. We will then only share in the spurned lover's adolescent fantasy of giving his life for the woman who scorned him so long as we are convinced of his absolute sincerity. The proof of that sincerity as well as the index of the propulsive fantasy is his closed eyes. Precluding acknowledgment of an audience, his closed eyes certify his act's spontaneity, making it the mortal pledge of selfless love that both he and Fragonard imagine. But this means that, were we to suspect even for a second that Coresus's suicide is not a spontaneous expression of pure love, were we to get the slightest hint that it is in fact a public performance conducted with an eye to an audience of any kind, the spell would break, and the supporting fantasy along with it.<sup>9</sup>

We draw a similar lesson from another painting Diderot much admired, Jean-Baptiste Greuze's *The Ungrateful Son* (1777; [Figure 45](#)).<sup>10</sup> Despite its abandonment of traditional literary sources, the painting's poetic ambitions could hardly be plainer. The composition takes the form of the dramatic blocking needed to ensure that each of the figures eloquently registering the impact of the cosmic quarrel between Father and Son is clearly visible. The pointed clarity thus granted the scene's moral testimony in turn underscores the political as well as aesthetic message behind setting the scene in a humble middle-class home. For it is intended to claim a tragic (and so heroic) dignity for the world of everyday life conventionally relegated to the lower genres of comedy and vignette.

Still, crucial to the effect Greuze sets out to achieve, as to the ironic deconstruction to which the result so readily lends itself, is the way all of the



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to naturalize the bourgeois vision of moral order so as to defeat the aristocratic prejudices of neoclassical convention. This goal demands the unthinking spontaneity required to convey the utter sincerity of the emotions by which each figure is inspired. And such sincerity is possible only on the assumption that the actors are wholly unconscious of potential witnesses – which is just what the scene's expressive absorptiveness assures.<sup>11</sup>

We can make a precisely similar point about a later, more overtly political exemplar, Jacques-Louis David's *Belisarius Begging for Alms* (1781; [Figure 46](#)). The painting tells a story of royal ingratitude of considerable topical interest in the financial chaos following the ruinously expensive French defeat in the Seven Years War – a defeat that, in retrospect, set the stage for the coming fall of the Ancien Régime.<sup>12</sup> Though the saviour of the empire for which he tirelessly fought deep into blind old age, the imperial general Belisarius has been reduced to begging in the street by the emperor's cold-heartedly political indifference to his fate. The picture accordingly has a lesson to teach, keyed to the imperial officer in the left middle-ground, reacting with dismay to the heroic commander's penury. As Fried notes, the officer stands in for the beholder in that he not only expresses the emotion the beholder is supposed to feel but appears literally absorbed in the painting in the way a properly self-forgetful spectator would be.<sup>13</sup> As in Fragonard's *Coresus* or Greuze's *Ungrateful Son*, the effect for a beholder who is not so moved is irresistibly comic: the officer's earnest pantomime strikes us as ludicrously melodramatic. But this merely underscores the centrality of the absorption that defines the officer's pose. His reaction to the old soldier's plight must seem spontaneously sincere, and it can only do so if he seems as unaware of beholders as the blind hero begging for alms.

As the foregoing suggests, however, what makes us laugh or, as when faced with the proto-fascist tendencies of explicitly political works like David's *Oath of the Horatii* (1784) or *Death of Marat* (1793), what makes us wince is the way pictures like these violate the aesthetic involved in the very act of embracing it. Far truer to type, and so artistically as well as morally more effective, are paintings like Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin's series of young men building houses of cards, or the deeply moving *A Lady Taking Tea* (1735), portraying his wife shortly before her death ([Figure 47](#)).<sup>14</sup> The tone of paintings of this sort is set by the lowercase domesticity of the actions they depict – that, and the absorbed attention required to perform them. In *Soap Bubbles* for example (1739; [Figure 48](#)), we get not only the intent focus of the youth blowing a bubble but that of the girl in the indescribable hat, transfixed by the infinitely fragile membrane expanding downward from the end of the pipe. The girl is surely a counterpart for the beholder: like the officer in David's *Belisarius*, she is as absorbed in watching the growing bubble as we are in watching her watch. The effect is





Figure 46. Jacques-Louis David, *Belisarius Begging for Alms* (1781).  
Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille. Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

ingeniously as well as comically confirmed by the delightful rightness of her ludicrous headgear. Whatever the nature or meaning of whatever exactly it is she put on her head, she has forgotten it, as unconscious now of wearing it as she was of its endearing absurdity when she first put it on. Chardin makes the same sort of joke in a late pastel self-portrait (1771; Figure 49), where the aged painter depicts himself in similarly outlandish garb, as an artist so obsessed with seeing what his tired old eyes need spectacles to see that he has no time to think about the clothes he wears to keep out the cold and prevent paint from getting on his balding head.





Figure 47. Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, *A Lady Taking Tea* (1735).  
Hunterian Gallery, Glasgow. Photo: University of Glasgow.

What is developed here, in emphatic contrast to the ostentatious theatricality of the art of the past, is what Fried calls the “supreme fiction” not only of an absorbed unconsciousness of the beholder but of the beholder’s non-existence.<sup>15</sup> The result is a startlingly new assertion of the autonomy of the artwork and, as a corollary, the absorbed contemplation characteristic of the specifically aesthetic response to art whose premier exponent, Fried’s guide and witness, is the Diderot of the *Salons*. It is in Diderot that Fried finds the prototype for the modern figure of the art writer conceived as a connoisseur and amateur setting out to give an account of both the work and the experience the work induces, this experience being as integral to the work’s afterlife as whatever meaning it communicates or whatever objective formal properties it may possess. And it



Figure 48. Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, *Soap Bubbles* (1739). Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Photo: Digital Image © 2018 Museum Associates/LACMA. Licensed by Art Resource, NY.

is also here that Fried finds the vocabulary needed to articulate the change that overtakes French painting over the course of the Enlightenment. First is theatricality, voicing the negative value against which French painters increasingly revolt. But above all is the key idea of absorption itself conveyed by the cluster of terms Diderot uses to characterize the new art he promotes: *naturel*, *non-chalant*, *naïf*. Each of these denotes some aspect of the absorbed spontaneity Diderot associates with unselfconscious nature as contrasted with the inescapably theatrical self-consciousness of art.<sup>16</sup>

Fried is entirely and importantly right about the phenomenon at issue and the change in form, character, intention, and aesthetic it sets in train. He is



Figure 49. Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, *Self-Portrait* (1771). Louvre, Paris.

Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

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also right about Diderot's responsiveness to it despite the residual conservatism evinced by his *ut pictura* taste for Fragonard's *Coresus* or his apparent inability to detect the self-defeating ironies at work in Greuze. It is to this underlying responsiveness that we owe Diderot's decidedly non-traditional commitment to lower forms, and in particular his ongoing efforts to make sense of his powerful attraction to the still lifes and vignettes of Chardin: paintings that, in theory, offered the merely derivative pleasures of form over content – of realistic facture over poverty of theme.<sup>17</sup>

Yet we cannot fully absorb the testimony of the phenomenon of absorption if we join Fried in defining it in purely aesthetic terms. What Fried sees in the newfound autonomy of the artwork that absorption makes possible is the “ontology of modern art.”<sup>18</sup> It constitutes the first step in the direction of what comes to be called “modern” art in the twentieth century of Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Jackson Pollock, opening the way for Fried's teacher, Clement Greenberg, and the anti-figurative theory of art as pure painterly surface that Greenberg conveyed not only to Fried but even to a committed Marxist like the younger T.J. Clark.<sup>19</sup> Still, without wishing to challenge the modernist lineage Fried adduces, I suggest that understanding absorption and the related ontology of modern art means putting them in the deeper context of the ontology of the modern itself.

A new, programmatically absorptive art does in fact emerge at this time, one that turns its back on the aesthetic of theatricality it replaces. And key to grasping the new aesthetic is the way art seems henceforth to turn its back on the beholder by depicting persons, actions, objects, and landscapes in a form that implies the absence of the spectator whose attentive presence is nonetheless essential to achieving the effect in view. In doing so, however, the art of absorption enacts the more general ontology implicit in the ontological status artworks now claim: an ontology that only belongs to art insofar as art formally and thematically espouses it. In setting itself against what it represents as the vacuous artificiality of the aesthetic regime of the theatrical art of the past, the new art of absorption expresses a new sense of reality that challenges the moralized picture of the world theatrical art defends.<sup>20</sup>

The fact that we find ourselves discussing rival aesthetics is already telling. The Renaissance, baroque, and neoclassical cultures of which theatrical art serves as a symptom and exponent do not talk in specifically aesthetic terms. They talk, rather, about “the beautiful,” “the noble,” “the sublime,” and above all “truth,” concepts whose moral content is as prominent as what we would now be tempted to regard as their purely aesthetic force. To be sure, most notably in the lectures of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, they elaborate the basic protocols of connoisseurship essential to the kind

of absorbed attention to artistic individuals on which modern art writing depends. They do not however recognize the autonomy of artworks and of the experiences they purvey that notions of aesthetics require.<sup>21</sup>

Nor, moreover, despite its attachment to the picture of art as “imitation of nature,” does the pre-Enlightenment culture of theatricality engage in the adjectival usage met in Diderot. While there is much discussion of nature as a standard, model, and goal, usually capitalizing the word in order to signal its metaphysical authority, there is little of a lowercase *naturel*. The corresponding term is in fact *le Vrai*, this too capitalized, conceived as transcending the lesser truth of ordinary experience. In this light, Diderot’s *naturel* is defined as the slavish conformity to “mere nature” associated with the minor genres – still life, landscape, and vignette – that were the chosen media of the absorptive painters featured in Diderot’s *Salons*.<sup>22</sup> The distinctions in play here motivate Roger de Piles’s hyperbolic insistence that “the True” in art “is more true than Truth itself.”<sup>23</sup> For the tradition that eighteenth-century absorptive art overthrows, truth in art captures, clarifies, and refines the timeless essence of Truth as such, beyond the reach of the mere natural truth Diderot describes as *le naturel*. The tradition pays tribute in this to the moral ideals whose problematization yields just that new goal, and that correspondingly modern mode of experience, that the Enlightenment calls “the aesthetic.” The modern art of absorption, together with the modern ontology of art it expounds, is the objective correlative of the modern experience of that broader ontology that aesthetics comes to register.

So the question that the phenomenon of aesthetic absorption invites us to ask is, what is the new ontology whose advent it marks? And behind this first question lurks a second: what is the aesthetic that it should be that ontology’s signal telltale?

In the spirit of the native informant Fried singles out as a guide, the attempt to answer these questions will take the form of a dialogue between Diderot and the philosopher who did more than any other to define both the aesthetic and the wider ontological, epistemological, and (this too is crucial) teleological problems the aesthetic was taken to solve, Immanuel Kant. It is also in Diderot’s spirit that the dialogue involved never actually took place. Diderot died in 1784, shortly after, roused from dogmatic slumber by David Hume’s *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* of 1748, Kant published, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* of 1781 (heavily revised in 1787), the first fruits of the critical turn to which we owe the *Critique of Judgment*’s doctrine of the aesthetic (1790). There is no evidence moreover that Kant himself read Diderot at all seriously. The two nonetheless stand for twin tendencies in the Enlightenment – paired horns, if you like, of the core dilemma, or rival faces of the central antinomy – to which both the problem of aesthetic experience and the philosophical prominence it



enjoyed bear witness. The dialogue will thus help clarify the ontology Kant and Diderot share from opposite sides of the abyss across which I imagine them catching each other's eye. And this clarification will in turn enable us to map the world this ontology characterizes, producing a picture one of whose features is the role the aesthetic plays in drawing it.

Let us begin by turning to Diderot's *Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those Who See* (1749) taken as setting forth characteristically teasing and informal "prolegomena to any future metaphysics." We will read this text for the light it sheds on the Kantian work that bears the latter name. It is important to remember that Kant wrote the *Prolegomena* (1783) at a moment when he did not yet know that the critical philosophy undertaken in the First Critique would have three parts. Indeed, with the completion of the *Critique of Practical Reason* in 1788, he initially thought he was finished. As the prefaces to the A and B editions of the First Critique assert, the key problem in the reform of philosophy of whose necessity Hume's *Enquiry* had convinced him was that of defining the terms and limits of metaphysics. And since, as Kant's attachment to the traditional demarcation of the two "parts" or branches of philosophy had led him to hope, in writing the First Critique he had taken care of Theory while in writing the Second he had disposed of Practice, there was nothing left to say concerning the a priori foundations of metaphysical science. The result was a pair of textbooks: the *Prolegomena*, followed by the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* of 1785. In these he summarized, in "analytic" style, what he took to be the lessons learned "synthetically" in the First and Second Critiques concerning the scope and guidelines for metaphysical speculation rescued from the tropes and paradoxes of Humean scepticism.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, as typical as Kant's predilection for traditional schemes of classification – a predilection that leads him to use the fourfold Scholastic system of quantitative, qualitative, relational, and modal "moments" to define the aesthetic's phenomenal properties – was his deep Pietistic conscientiousness. Though he in one sense knew the task was complete, he could not help feeling that something was missing. He would eventually come to see that what was missing was in fact not only the critique of judgment that supplied his critical philosophy with the final three-part development needed to determine, among other things, how to decide into which of the first two parts a given phenomenon was to be classed. He also lacked a systematic exploration of the grounds for the critical philosophy itself as a whole, at the very heart of which he discovered an abyss or *Abgrund* over which some sort of *Übergang* or bridge had to be thrown. The outcome would be none other than aesthetics. Aesthetics became the bridge not only across the gap between theory and practice, or facts and values. It further connected the world of experience with which both facts and



values are concerned to the teleological speculations alone capable of giving experience meaning by setting it the overarching task that neither theory nor practice could provide.<sup>25</sup>

Still, when the *Prolegomena* was composed, this later development remained a thing of the future – neither a plan nor even yet a formal desideratum but only a feeling. And the arena if not the focus of this feeling was the problem of determining the “bounds of pure reason” addressed in the book’s conclusion.

That Kant’s analysis of the scope of any future metaphysics should conclude with a discussion of bounds and, as a means to that end, with a definition of the concept of bounds itself is crucial. For while the term “bounds” (the German *Grenzen*) may suggest the idea of reaching limits (*Schranken*) beyond which metaphysics cannot go and remain the science Kant means it to, it is a property of a bound to leave open the question of what (if anything) lies beyond it. In mathematics and the natural sciences, we meet definite and insuperable limits in that these undertakings are limited, precisely, to “appearances only,” that is, to the data of sensuous experience: “[W]hat cannot be an object of sensuous intuition (such as the concepts of metaphysics or of morals) lies entirely without [their] sphere” (*Prolegomena*, 93). For this reason, and to this extent, Kant was compelled to acknowledge that Hume was right. If the object of our investigations is knowledge on the model of the sort mathematics and natural science supply, then there are absolute limits. These limits do not of course apply to the sheer mass of knowledge we are capable of acquiring since, viewed in the a posteriori perspective of the “synthetic” process of finding things out, knowledge is as potentially infinite as the experiences on which it relies. But they do emphatically apply to the *kinds* of things that can be known, and thus to the character and bearing of properly knowable things as defined by the a priori process of critical analysis.

By contrast, what metaphysics and morals confront are bounds rather than limits. The world of mathematical and natural-scientific cognition – that is, the world of nature as the First Critique shows it to be – is as it were shrink-wrapped such that no communication is possible with anything that falls outside its self-determined limits. By contrast, the world in which metaphysics and morals move points beyond itself as a condition of possibility of moral and metaphysical experience alike. Even in the physical world of ordinary usage, “[b]ounds [...] always presuppose a space existing outside a certain definite place and inclosing it.” Just so, what in mathematics and natural science are encountered as limits become, when metaphysics and morals meet them, intimations of something more: the realm of transcendental Ideas no less imperative for being incapable of the sort of positive realization mathematics and natural science demand (*Prolegomena*, 93).

Viewed in the metaphysical perspective the *Prolegomena* defines, the very limits to human knowledge the strictly empirical canons of Humean scepticism impose are transformed into a kind of promise (the Christian resonance of this term is deliberate) of some other world to come. This explains the still inchoate feeling expressed here in terms of transcendental ideas and their “dialectical” relation to the natural world of inherently limited sensuous experience from which the Third Critique’s analysis of the grounds of feeling itself eventually springs in the name of “judgment.” When judgment is “determinative,” that is, capable of deciding once and for all just what something is – an authority Kantian natural science shares with Kantian morals, in that the one determines true and false while the other right and wrong – we get definite answers we have no reason to doubt. But as experience teaches, most notably in those cases where the decision involved is aesthetic or teleological, many of the judgments we form are “reflective” rather than determinative; and judgments of this sort leave us in a state of open-ended wonder we can neither dismiss nor determine one way or another (*Judgment*, 18–20). It is finally in this open-endedness that the *Prolegomena*’s contrast between bounds and limits takes hold.

There are those, myself included, who feel that, for all the problems with which the critical enterprise is fraught, problems with which Kant still wrestles in his late anthropological explorations of the “crooked timber of humanity from which nothing straight was ever made,”<sup>26</sup> he was on to something important we have still not properly understood. Seen in this light, Kant’s achievement is to have found a way to reconcile the naturalistic ontology of natural science with the incorrigible longings associated with a metaphysical view of life. In the language of the *Critique of Judgment*, he found a means of turning the *Bestimmungen* or reductive determinations of empirical knowledge into a *Stimmung* or call to some higher order of things. And he did so by showing how calls of this sort find an experimental basis within the field of experience itself (*Judgment*, 114–17 and 126–40).

But as Kant himself concedes, this achievement is not only “reflective” rather than “determinative”; it is dialectical because antinomian, bouncing us back towards its opposite in the limits naturalism decrees. As he writes in a footnote appended to the *Prolegomena*’s summary of the First Critique, the analytic method critical philosophy pursues is “regressive” in that, “in contradistinction to the synthetic or progressive,” that is, the empirical work of discovery to which natural science turns, analysis “signifies only that we start from what is sought, as if it were given, and ascend to the only conditions under which it is possible” (*Prolegomena*, 21). The question he poses then is what would have to be true for us to understand where our inveterate interest in metaphysical

things leads us to feel we ought to go. More precisely, what would the grounds of experience have to be for metaphysics to make legitimate sense?

Diderot's achievement, on the other hand, is to have gone in the opposite direction. Rather than find a way to make the natural world conform to our metaphysical longings, he sets out to describe those longings themselves as a natural function of the natural world as such. And the result is less the naturalistic reduction this seems to threaten (or promise) than a reversal of poles designed to produce something like the effect Kant seeks. In Kant, the outcome appears regressive in that it is meant to take us back to the principles of metaphysics conceived as the spring of human experience of any sort. In Diderot, by contrast, it becomes progressive, leading to something that has never existed before, but that could and perhaps even ought to, if only we learn to exploit the essential creativity we owe to our character as incarnate natural beings.

Like so much of what he wrote over the course of his career, Diderot's *Letter on the Blind* is an occasional piece composed in response to current events. Diderot was many things: a journalist and letter writer; a novelist and dramatist; an editor and businessman; a philosopher, mathematician, art critic, theatre critic, gossip, and raconteur. The one thing he was not was a systematic thinker of a Kantian stripe. As Isaiah Berlin would have said, repurposing the famous quip of the ancient Archilochus, Diderot was a fox rather than a hedgehog, ready to write about anything as circumstances dictated.<sup>27</sup>

The *Letter* is an entirely typical case in point. For a start there is just the fact that it takes the form of a letter. Though circulated in manuscript to a wider public, thereby attracting the attention of the civil authorities, who clapped him in jail for it, the *Letter* presents itself as a private epistle addressed to an anonymous lady to whom Diderot had promised an outing that circumstances now prevent. The outing itself was occasioned by the announcement of a public event of great public interest owing to debates raging in the Republic of Letters at the time: the removal of a cataract from the eye of a woman born blind by the physician and scientist René-Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur.<sup>28</sup>

The immediate question it was hoped Réaumur's experiment would settle concerned what a blind person would see once the impediment to sight had been removed. Would Réaumur's patient see anything at all, or is vision a skill as well as a natural endowment that demands training and experience in its use? More specifically, following the speculations of the Anglo-Irish natural philosopher William Molyneux to which Diderot adverts in the letter, would a formerly blind person be able to recognize and name, on sight, shapes known till then only by touch? Would Réaumur's patient be able to see, for example, that a solid figure known to her by touch as a sphere or cube was in fact a sphere

or cube, or would she have to learn how to coordinate information received by tactile means with what the restored faculty of sight conveyed (*Letter*, 165–81)?

As it happens though, as Diderot explains in an opening paragraph that features a veritable blizzard of ocular allusions, metaphors, and conceits, neither the *philosophe* nor his lady friend were to be admitted to the audience before whose avid eyes the cataract was to be removed:

I suspected, madam, that the congenital blind person from whose eye M. de Réaumur has just removed the cataract would fail to teach you what you wanted to learn; but I had no way of guessing that this would be neither that person's fault nor yours. I beseeched the patient's benefactor in person, through his best friends, through the compliments I made him; we obtained nothing, and the first apparatus will be removed without you. Persons of the first distinction had the honor of sharing the refusal he made the *philosophes*: in a word, he did not want to drop the veil except before inconsequential eyes. Should you be curious to know why so skillful an academicien performs so secretly experiments that, in your view, could not have too great a number of enlightened witnesses, I would reply that the observations of so celebrated a man are less in need of spectators when they are made than of auditors when they are finished. I have thus, madam, returned to my original plan and, forced to forgo an experiment in which I foresaw little chance of instruction for either you or me, but from which M. de Réaumur will doubtless draw much greater profit, I set about philosophizing with my friends on the important matter the experiment had for its object. How happy I would be if the relation of one of our conversations enabled me to replace the spectacle I too lightly promised you! (*Letter*, 131)

The occasion of Réaumur's experiment, and of his refusal to admit Diderot to the operating theatre in which it was to take place, becomes the occasion for a substitute, first in the form of the letter Diderot writes and then in that of an activity of another sort whose results the letter transmits – an opportunity to philosophize. The upshot of the decision to philosophize with his fellow *philosophes* will involve experiments of its own: the visit to the congenitally blind man of the town of Le Puisieux for instance (*Letter*, 131–40), or the discussion of the case of the blind English mathematician, Nicholas Saunderson (*Letter*, 146–64). The latter proves all the more interesting in that, though relating to a celebrated public personality whose career had already attracted considerable attention, Diderot tacks on to it an affecting death scene for whose existence we have no evidence whatever.<sup>29</sup> The *Letter* will thus perform a kind of thought experiment that not only compensates for the real one Réaumur refused to let

Diderot attend but goes far beyond anything the Prussian charlatan would ever have imagined.

The case of Saunderson in particular will in fact go metaphysical in just the way Kant's exploration of the limits of natural science recommends. In Kant however the goal is to rescue metaphysics from the disrepute in which Hume has placed it. Kant does so by showing how the limits defining the realm of sensuous experience can be re-described as bounds whose experimental status as bounds implies a transcendence that the immanence of lived experience seems to preclude. The deep motive for the "regressive" method of Kantian analytic is the restoration of an opening on teleological dimensions that the shrink-wrapped world of experimental science seals off. By contrast, the metaphysical speculations that, in the persons of the blind man of Le Puiseaux, the blind English mathematician, and the *philosophes* who converse about them, are occasioned by Diderot's experiments with blindness turn the experience of transcendence into an inner function of immanence itself. Where the horizon to which Kant directs our eyes lies behind us, in the imaginary realm of teleology restored, Diderot's lies ahead, in the world of experience as blindness shows it to be in our power to change it as an expression of our inescapable engagement in it.

This power to change the world as a function of our experimental interventions in it is reflected in the doubts Diderot expresses right at the start concerning the usefulness of Réaumur's experiment. There are many reasons for doubt, among them the likelihood that the first-person reports on which Réaumur has to rely will prove inconclusive. Unlike what we find in Saunderson's case, or even in that of the blind man of Le Puiseaux, there is little room to suppose that Réaumur's patient is equipped to answer the kinds of question *philosophes* will want to ask (*Letter*, 164–5). But there is good reason to suspect that the experiment itself will be just as unable to do so since its goal is, precisely, restorative. In granting the blind woman sight, Réaumur's surgery will restore her to the normal (and so normative) condition enjoyed by the generality of human beings. There is no sign, at least in Diderot's admittedly biased telling, that Réaumur will be interested in the critical light the experiment could throw on the norm itself. On the contrary, in restoring the woman's sight, Réaumur will restore the norm as such, leaving it wholly unquestioned in its status as representing an incontrovertibly natural state of affairs.

One of the doors Diderot knocks on here is that of what people will later come to think of as ideology. In the words of the first sentences of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, the world is not just "all that is the case" in the sense of being the sum of existing, purely physical states of affairs. It is "the totality of facts, not of things"; and these facts include what we

think about it as well as the material objects we think with reference to.<sup>30</sup> The world in short is how we see it as much as whatever we discover it to be in itself, independent of sight or thought.

The letter's progressive rather than restorative ambitions explain the gathering thrust of the inquiries it reports. The focus of the (doubtless fictional) conversation with the blind man of Le Puiseaux is not what the world would look like to someone restored to sight; it is what it looks like to the blind. Blindness thereby offers the occasion (that word again) to imagine an entirely different relation to reality than the one the sighted know; and it does so as a means of interrogating the operations of sense experience in general, whatever its form. As most commentators have noticed, the letter accordingly explores the blindness to which we are reduced by possessing the normal complement of sensory organs of which the blind are deprived.<sup>31</sup> Diderot wonders what a blind man would make of a mirror, for example, producing, in terms of what Cartesian optics had shown to be the inherently analogous sense of touch, a definition that René Descartes himself would have been proud to devise had he been blind (*Letter*, 133–34). He notes how the blind are naturally nocturnal creatures living most fully, happily, and productively in the dark hours that send other people to bed (*Letter*, 132). And he goes on to observe that the blind are great lovers of domestic tidiness (*Letter*, 132), great haters of thieves (*Letter*, 139), spontaneously free of the inhibiting virtue of modesty (*Letter*, 139–40), yet connoisseurs of the distinctive beauty of the human voice and the palpable symmetries of a well-formed human face (*Letter*, 138). In each case Diderot reveals just how limited the sighted are – how far the visible world's blinding self-evidence (*ça crève les yeux*) conceals that world's true nature.

Nor is it simply, or even primarily, in these small-scale domestic ways that the enhanced scope for experience vision affords turns out to limit those who possess it. As noted a moment ago, Diderot goes metaphysical. Beyond the effort to lead us to see the world differently is the desire to unsettle the general conception of reality itself of which the world as we come to know it through experiments of the kind the letter reports is merely one of a perhaps infinite number of equally expressive possibilities.<sup>32</sup>

The crux of this further development is the death of Saunderson. Diderot's account of that event begins in touristic mode, with shameless gawking at a kind of idiot savant. Saunderson was famous for having been not just a blind mathematician but, at least in Diderot's telling, a blind geometer. Saunderson was in fact an algebrist. He does seem to have invented the pegboard with which, using a system of strings attached to pins with heads of different sizes, he was able to perform geometrical operations of various sorts. Still, his chief claim to fame lay in analysis: that branch of mathematics, pioneered by Descartes, by which

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properties of the visually apprehensible figures on which geometers work can be converted into equations. This conversion accordingly reveals the priority of purely numerical relations that do not require visualization to be discovered or operated on.<sup>33</sup> But though Diderot makes the going harder for himself by picturing (and probably thinking of) Saunderson as a geometer, he does get to the crucial point in the end: the degree to which sighted persons are blinded by the apparent self-evidence of the visual properties that meet us at first glance to the underlying numerical relations that define geometrical figures from below.

What seems occult about Saunderson's work is less the operations he performed on his pegboard than the algebraic analysis of the pure quantities involved:

Three things need to be distinguished in all questions that combine physics and geometry [i.e., analysis]: the phenomenon to be explained, the geometer's postulates [or axioms], and the calculation that results from these postulates. Now, it is evident that, whatever a blind-man's penetration, the phenomena of light and colours are unknown to him. He will understand the postulates because they all relate to palpable causes; but he will be in no position to grasp the reason the geometer has to prefer them to others, for he would have to be able to compare the postulates with the phenomena. The blind-man thus takes the postulates as they are given to him – a ray of light for a thin and elastic filament or a series of tiny bodies that strike our eyes at incredible speed – and performs his calculations accordingly. The passage from physics to geometry has been crossed, and the question becomes purely mathematical. (*Letter*, 155)

This "passage" from "physics to geometry" is properly uncanny in the strict Freudian sense, giving the term the force of something like the return of the repressed. Because he is blind and so obliged to come at geometry by algebraic means, Saunderson is in touch with the hidden truth about the properties of the visual order geometry describes. For the truth is that they are not ultimately visual but rather numerical, and so objects of the kind of pure, emphatically non-visual intuitions that Baruch Spinoza associates with the "adequate ideas" alone capable of granting true knowledge.<sup>34</sup> The wonder inspired by the operations Saunderson performs in converting shapes into equations becomes a stalking horse for a determinism all the more coercive for hiding behind the visual phenomena it explains.

The aptness of allusion to Spinoza already hints at the emerging metaphysical stakes. Diderot's Spinozism is hard to document because he was so cagey about it. As Jonathan Israel remarks, Diderot was careful, following his imprisonment in the chateau de Vincennes, to shape his public declarations in such a way

as to preserve plausible deniability.<sup>35</sup> In the *Letter* itself, it is Saunderson who expounds the Spinozan vision of a universe determined from start to finish by immanent material laws deprived of transcendental purpose of any kind; the *philosophe* confines himself to clucking disapproval. And when Diderot cites Spinozan ideas elsewhere in his public writings, where he does not simply avoid their author's name, he either attributes them to someone else (Maupertuis, for instance) or claims to report them only in order to warn against the dangers they pose – dangers he then goes on to expound at length, offering little if any rebuttal. The result is that his one major explicit allusion to Spinozan thought comes in *Jacques the Fatalist and His Master*, where it is presented (again without rebuttal) as the belief system of a fictional character in a book only published in 1796, 12 years after the author's death. Yet we catch glimpses of Spinoza throughout his career, and nowhere more unmistakably than in his speculations on the nature of human knowledge.

As the *Ethics* (1677) tirelessly argues in as many ways as Spinoza can think of, the deep source of human error (and so of the unhappiness it is the *Ethics'* therapeutic task to cure) is our inveterate habit of taking the world at face value. As we have noted earlier in the book, Pierre Gassendi objected to what he saw as the short-sighted because non-dialectical inferences Descartes draws from the cogito, observing that “things appear to us as they appear to us” – a fact as pertinent to the way we appear to ourselves in the cogito as to the phenomena we meet in the outside world.<sup>36</sup> The trick is to understand how and why things appear to us as they do. This insight leads Spinoza to critique dualist mentalism by redefining mind as an “idea of the body” (2p11–12), granting the genitive a simultaneously objective and subjective force in which ideas *about* the body are seen to proceed from (and so express) the body itself. It also persuades him to define appearance in general conceived (in its character as *species* or *imago*) as a precipitate of the faculty of imagination, a faculty as duplicitously specious as the technical name it bears in Descartes, Spinoza, Hume, and Kant alike.<sup>37</sup>

Take an example Spinoza examines in the scholium to part 2, proposition 35. In ordinary experience, we perceive the sun as a relatively small object placed at a distance of some two hundred feet from us because that is how our body-minds apprehend it. This is the form the sun impresses on the eye, and the form the eye takes in receiving that impression. Nor does this impression change once we have figured out that the sun is in fact many times bigger than the earth and that it stands at a vastly greater distance. It still looks nearby and small even when we know that it is neither since the physics of visual perception as defined both by the sun as an object in space and by the body that perceives or “imagines” it determines perception that way.

However, what is true of the ostensibly purely physical properties of things is just as true of what we think of us as their moral character. Spinoza hammers at this point relentlessly – the more emphatically for taking each fresh opportunity to do so as an occasion to refer back to earlier ones. The first and foremost is the appendix to part 1. The appendix follows the radically monistic account of “God or Nature” as a single infinite substance all of whose elements are locked together to form a single system each of whose infinite parts is a deterministic expression of its immanent relation to all others.<sup>38</sup> Against this background, Spinoza explodes the myth of final causes responsible for the delusion that the universe has a transcendent creator endowed with a moral purpose nature is compelled to obey. Spinoza explodes this myth by showing how the notion of final causes, and so belief that “God or Nature” has moral ends in view, stands the natural order on its head by reversing the logical sequence of cause and effect. But he then goes on to explain the delusion by adducing its origins in the natural order itself. In the appendix this yields the systematically naturalistic etiology of moral properties the rest of the book argues out.

Spinoza will not be in a position to make the case in detail until later, on the basis of part 2’s account of monistic body-mind and part 3’s analysis of the modes and origins of the human emotions that at once express and colour our inescapable incorporation in the natural world. Nevertheless, the appendix already fingers the source of finalist fantasy in the necessarily self-regarding character of human experience. Human beings, like all other denizens of the natural world, perceive things as a function of their own needs and interests. As a result, those needs and interests determine the shape things assume in our perceptions of them, granting them a specious purposiveness whose warrant is nothing more than the purposes we ourselves bring to the encounter. It is thus inevitable that “men become convinced that everything that is created is created on their behalf” since that is the light in which they see the world. And once that happens, that is, “when men become convinced” in this way,

they were bound to consider as the most important quality in every individual thing that which was most useful to them, and to regard as of the highest excellence all those things by which they were most benefited. Hence they came to form these abstract notions to explain the nature of things: – Good, Bad, Order, Confusion, Hot, Cold, Beauty, Ugliness; and since they believed that they are free, the following abstract notions came into being: – Praise, Blame, Right, Wrong. [...] All that conduces to well-being and to the worship of God they call Good, and the contrary Bad. And since those who do not understand the nature of things, but only imagine things, make no affirmative judgments about these things themselves

and mistake their imagination for intellect, they are firmly convinced that there is order in things, ignorant as they are of things and of their own nature. For when things are in such arrangement that, being presented to us through our senses, we can readily picture them and thus readily remember them, we say that they are well arranged; if the contrary, we say that they are ill-arranged, or confused. And since those things we can readily picture we find pleasing compared to other things, men prefer order to confusion, as though order were something in Nature other than what is relative to our imagination. And they say that God has created all things in an orderly way, without realising that they are thus attributing human imagination to God – unless perchance they mean that God, out of consideration for the human imagination, arranged all things in the way that men could most easily imagine. (241–2)

At this early stage in the general exposition, the appendix is obliged to present this state of affairs on the evidence of what look like contingent human perceptions and choices – this is what happens “*when* men become convinced.” Later, however, Spinoza explains it as being the inescapable expression of the Hobbesian machinery of pleasure, pain, and ruthlessly selfish desire whose spring is the *conatus*: the inborn drive by which each thing in nature strives both to preserve its own being and to extend over other beings that power that most fully expresses its inner character. The result is the scholium to part 3, proposition 9: “The mind, both in so far as it has clear and distinct ideas and in so far as it has confused ideas, endeavors to persist in its own being over an indefinite period of time, and is conscious of this *conatus*.” The scholium sets forth a series of interdependent reductions that demonstrate how what “is called Will” is just the *conatus* and what we call “desire” is just whatever “appetite” the *conatus* inspires insofar as we are aware of it. This in turn produces a chiasmic inversion to which Spinoza returns at least once, an inversion whose form as a chiasmus not only articulates but enacts the dialectic that Gassendi, Diderot, and Kant all have in mind: “It is clear from the above that we do not endeavor, will, seek after or desire a thing because we judge it to be good. On the contrary, we judge a thing to be good because we endeavor, will, seek after and desire it” (284; translation slightly altered).

This wonderful formula, together with the radical reversal of perspective it enjoins, illumines the exactly similar dialectical line of reasoning that Diderot’s account of Saunderson’s mathematical accomplishments pursues. On the one hand, there is Diderot’s presiding reductionism. What we perceive as the visual properties of geometrical figures are nothing but the visible expression of the hidden numerical relations that determine them from behind. On the other hand, the reversal of perspective invites us to see the moral world of “normal”

experience as a dialectical byproduct of the physical world of sense. We get a foretaste of this reversal in the description of the moral scheme of the blind man of Le Puiseaux. His indifference to modesty, his special hatred of thieves, his pronounced love of tidiness are all a spontaneous because deterministically necessary reflex of the world as the blind perceive it.

The true crisis, though, is reached with the account of Saunderson's death that the discussion of his gifts as a geometer occasions. Like everything else in the letter, including the bouts of philosophizing the opening paragraph presents as the fruit of the compensatory conversations to which Diderot and his friends were reduced by Réaumur's refusal to allow them to attend the operation on his patient, the death of Saunderson takes the form of a dialogue: a one-act drama, a *comédie larmoyante*, divided into two scenes.

The first scene contains an exchange between the blind mathematician and a pious minister named Holmes, who comes to offer Christian consolation at the hour of Saunderson's death. The core of Holmes's consolation is the assurance of a life after death provided by God's manifest existence as Creator. When Saunderson objects that he has reason to doubt the benevolence of Holmes's God on the score, precisely, of the blindness that makes his case so interesting, Holmes blunders on, blindly as well as tactlessly invoking a proof of God's existence from the design to which the majesty of the visible universe bears witness. Despite the fact that, as Holmes reminds him, his great predecessors Isaac Newton and Samuel Clarke embraced this proof, Saunderson proves immune to the argument. Holmes's eloquence prompts a crushing rejoinder that reduces the poor padre to impotent silence. Portraying himself as the crippled product of sheer pointless accident, Saunderson hypothesizes that the universe itself as a whole is driven by mechanisms as inherently blind as he is. This leads him not only to deny his interlocutor's finalist faith but to compare human beings to insects comically intent on giving the world the bug-like face their condition requires:

I conjecture that, in the beginning when matter in fermentation gave birth to the universe, creatures like me were very common. But why may I not affirm of worlds what I believe of animals? How many botched and crippled worlds have dissolved, and perhaps reform now to dissolve again at every instant, in distant spaces where I cannot touch and you cannot see, yet where motion continues and will continue to combine masses of matter until they have arrived at some arrangement in which they can persist? O, philosophers, transport yourselves accordingly with me to the confines of this universe, beyond the point where I touch and you see organized beings. Wander with me across this new ocean, and seek beyond these irregular agitations some vestiges of that intelligent being whose wisdom you admire here!

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But what use is there in dragging you from your element? What is the world, Mister Holmes? A composite subject to revolutions all of which indicate a continual tendency to destruction; a rapid succession of beings that tread on each other's heels, shove each other aside, and vanish; a transitory symmetry; a momentary order. I reproached you a while ago for gauging the perfection of things according to your own capacity, and I could reproach you now for measuring their duration against the number of days you live. You judge of the continuous existence of the world as the ephemeral fly judges of yours. The world is eternal for you just as you are eternal to the creature who lives for only an instant. Even so, the insect is more reasonable than you. What a prodigious succession of generations of ephemeral beings bears witness to your eternity! What an immense tradition! Yet we all pass away, without our being able to assign either the real extension we occupy or the exact time that we will have endured. Perhaps time, matter, and space form no more than a single point. (*Letter*, 162–3)

For Saunderson, because he is blind, the prospect of death seems absolute. Death is indeed, to use the pregnant eighteenth-century word to which James Boswell resorts on the similar occasion of visiting Hume's deathbed, the total annihilation of which trying to picture a world without sight offers the pertinaciously paradoxical image.<sup>39</sup> Nor is it just that Saunderson cannot see the spectacle Holmes adduces. The fact that he cannot see it, that his organism is deficient in this respect and so a "monstrous" deviation from the ostensible human norm, suggests an arbitrariness in the order of nature that inspires a cosmic vision in which moral salience of any sort is unanswerably destroyed.

True, Saunderson wavers at the last. In the second of the dialogue's two scenes, the mathematician's stoic calm in the face of annihilation reduces all of the witnesses gathered at his bedside to inimitably Diderotian tears. However, at the very moment when death takes him, he cries out for divine mercy: "O, God of Clarke and Newton, take pity on me" (*Letter*, 163). Saunderson's cry nonetheless administers a sharp perspectival twist that turns the scene's affecting climax into meat for further sceptical reflection. For the God Saunderson invokes is not God *tout court*. It is the God of Clarke and Newton, leaving it deliciously unclear just how the dying man's plangent apostrophe should be taken.

In a memorable image whose both Diderotian and Spinozan pedigree there is no reason to doubt, the physicist Richard Feynman likens the human pursuit of knowledge to what water bugs might undertake in trying to grasp the physical universe from the corner of the swimming pool in which they bob about.<sup>40</sup> Saunderson's analogy between the world as generations of flies imagine it and the one human beings just as vainly try to comprehend suggests an exactly similar relation. Like Saunderson's flies or Feynman's water bugs, we attempt



and, as a stimulus to that effort, desire to understand the world to which some inscrutable pattern of natural laws has called us and the condition to which existence so construed adapts us. However, our desire remains an expression of everything that, in forming us this way, ensures that we can never know in any absolute sense what our nature prompts us to. Like the blind, we are reduced to groping in the dark, searching for clues to something more than we will ever be able to lay hands on. There are natural limits to what we can know, and the form these limits take is set by the experience that determines the shape, scope, and salience of such knowledge as we possess.

Yet where Kant insists on these limits in order to turn them into bounds from the standpoint of what he regards as the experimentally underdetermined judgments we are led to make in aesthetic experience and the teleological speculations it resembles, Diderot reorients the entire enterprise. He does so by suggesting how the experience of limits is itself limitless. It is limitless first of all in that, by exposing them, he pushes them further out to reveal new paths along which the range of potential experience can be explored. But it is limitless above all in that, unlike Kant and, for all his emphasis on nature's eternity and infinitude, unlike Spinoza as well, he does not regard experience in purely spatial terms, as limited to the essentially static dimension of being conceived as the conceptual totality of what is. He regards it rather in temporal terms, as an expression of the evolving generations of Saunderson's flies and the changes that can be imagined to come over them as a function of their evolving collective life.

We return now to the aesthetic – more specifically, to the aesthetic as evinced by Diderot's response to the underlying ontology of what Fried teaches us to think of as absorptive art. The place to go for this is the *Salons*.

Like the *Letter on the Blind*, the individual *Salons* are occasional pieces profoundly marked by the contingencies that led Diderot to write them. Diderot had a lot to say about art in all its forms, literary, musical, and theatrical as well as plastic. But he did so as much because art offered the occasion to talk about other things as because other things prodded him to talk about art. As he remarks at one point to his correspondent in the *Letter*, "endless jumps to the side, you'll say: yes, madam, such is the condition for our treatise" (*Letter*, 175–6). Like Michel de Montaigne before him, and like his Anglo-Irish contemporary Laurence Sterne, to whom *Jacques the Fatalist* is so deeply indebted, Diderot progresses by digression as the associative laws of wit and whimsy take him.

Where the *Salons* are concerned, one factor was membership in the circle formed around the freethinking Paul Thiry, baron d'Holbach, to which Diderot's editor, Grimm, belonged. It was then in his character as a *philosophe*

that he made Grimm's acquaintance; and it was Grimm in turn who provided the impetus for the *Salons* by commissioning Diderot to contribute reviews of the biennial juried exhibitions of the Académie Royale de Peinture to the *Correspondance littéraire*, a manuscript newsletter circulated to a select private subscribership across Europe.<sup>41</sup> So we owe the *Salons* to something like chance. True, chance here is heavily overdetermined in that it was only because of shared interests, friendships, and tendencies that Diderot met Grimm and that Grimm saw in Diderot the art writer he needed. Yet there is nothing to say that Diderot would ever have written anything like the *Salons* without Grimm's guiding hand. It is thus entirely appropriate that the result of this collaboration should take the form of letters to Grimm since Grimm was their only begetter.

But the *Salons* are also occasional pieces inspired by public events whose elements, the paintings Diderot came to write about, were those (and only those) the Académie's selection committee happened to jury in. There was no way, consequently, to know what he would write about until any given year's exhibition opened, offering in the process just those works Diderot found waiting for him.

The *Salons* themselves emphasize this fundamental contingency by their mode of presentation. Diderot's reports (and it is important to stress that he functions as a reporter here) begin with an assessment of that year's show as a whole. In 1767, for example, the Salon with which we are particularly concerned, the theme of the preamble was "the poverty" of that year's exhibition (*Salons*, 3.53). Diderot adduces a number of reasons for the exhibition's poor quality: the omission of work by painters of the first rank (Pierre Boucher, Maurice Quentin de La Tour, Jean-Jacques Bachelier, Greuze) (*Salons*, 3.53); the ignorance of the *amateurs* who had hijacked the authority to dictate public taste (*Salons*, 3.55); or the philistine character of the patrons to whom the exhibited artists owed their commissions (*Salons*, 3.56). However, Diderot's chief target is the slavish imitation of antiquity, and especially Greek sculpture. He was in particular irked by the absence of what he does not hesitate to call coherent "metaphysical" thought about the nature of art – the complacency with which Academic theorists simply took it for granted that great art is defined as the imitation of great classical art (*Salons*, 3.59).

Diderot next proceeds to the paintings themselves, which he comments on in what looks like the order in which he met them in the exhibition hall, jotting down his impressions as he moved from place to place. Successive sections of the *Salon* of 1767 are thus devoted to successive artists, whose names supply the headings for remarks arranged in the sequence in which he encountered their works – pictures, I repeat, that Diderot discusses not because he had some prior agenda but because the Académie happened to select them.<sup>42</sup> The *Salons* are

accordingly set under the seal of occasion, and so of the contingencies of which occasion is the precipitate. Diderot stresses the point in 1767 in the paragraph that makes the transition from the preamble to the main body of his review by adding a further contingency – the fact that it is just he who writes rather than someone else:

Here is what I criticize and what I praise. I praise, I blame, according to my own private sensation, which lays down no law. God would ask nothing more of us than sincerity with ourselves. Artists will surely refrain from being more demanding. It's easy enough to say, this is beautiful, this is bad; but the reason for our pleasure or disgust sometimes takes a while to declare itself, and I am under orders to a devil of a man who won't give it time to emerge. (*Salons*, 3.65)

Though Diderot is bound to write about the paintings that come to hand, what he writes depends as much on who he is, how he responds, and the firm deadline Grimm sets as on the pictures the exhibition offers. This is of course in part a modesty trope. Unlike the first umpire in the story of the three umpires in heaven, discussing the art of declaring balls and strikes down on earth, he does not “call ‘em like they was”; he claims, rather, like the second, to “call ‘em like I saw ‘em.” Yet, especially given the mediate form in which his readers meet the pictures in his review, he tacitly joins the third in observing that, “Hell! They weren’t nothin’ till I called ‘em.” To the extent that, as readers, we see anything here, it is a complex composite conditioned by the author and his medium.

We turn now to the section of the *Salon* of 1767 most relevant to the case I am trying to make: the “Vernet Promenade,” describing the Vernet landscapes in that year’s show.

One of the things singling out this passage is a device Diderot uses repeatedly in the *Salons* to convey the special character of his response to painting. For his was a specifically absorbed response that bears witness to the absorptive nature of the pictures that evoke it. His method answers moreover to what the preamble to the *Salon* of 1767 terms the groping (*tâtonnement*) alone capable of eliciting the metaphysical truth supposed to dictate the slavish imitation of Greek art whose theatricalized “routines” are chiefly to blame for that year’s mediocrity. As the preamble puts it, unlike their contemporary French epigones, “the ancients had no ancients.” This obliged them to feel their way towards the “primal model” or “intellectual image” in which they found that “ideal of beauty, that true line” Diderot’s contemporaries imitate (*Salons*, 3.59–61). But it is precisely because they had to grope their way to artistic truth that the Greeks achieved what they did:

I submit that the main reason why the arts have been unable in any age and in any nation to attain the degree of perfection they had among the Greeks is that it was the one place on earth where people were forced to grope their way forward. It is that, thanks to the models they have left us, we have never been able, like them, to reach, slowly and gradually, the beauty of those models. It is that we have made ourselves their more or less servile imitators and copyists, and that the ideal model, the true line, has never been ours except as something borrowed, muffled, and obscure. (*Salons*, 3.63)

In an exactly similar way, what Vernet's landscapes oblige (and so enable) Diderot to do, in part just because, as landscapes, they tell no story of the sort most of the other paintings selected that year trade on, is grope his way towards discovering a subject for himself.

So he begins:

#### VERNET

I had written this artist's name at the top of my page, and was about to talk to you about his works, when I set off for a countryside close to the sea and renowned for the beauty of its sites. There, while some people squandered the most beautiful hours of the day, the most beautiful days of the season, their money, and their gaiety around a gaming table; while others, with guns on their shoulders, wore themselves out with fatigue following their dogs across the fields; while some went wandering in the byways of a park whose trees, fortunately for the young companions of their errors, keep careful secrets; and while grave personages still made the dining room resound with their tumultuous cries at seven in the evening, arguing about the latest principles of the economists, the usefulness or uselessness of philosophy, religion, morals, actors, actresses, the government, the choice between French and Italian music, the fine arts, letters, and other questions of importance for which they sought solutions at the bottom of their bottles before, hoarse and staggering, they returned to their twilight bedchambers, whose doors they found hard to open, in order to recover, in an armchair, from the heat and zeal with which they had sacrificed their lungs, their stomachs, and their reason with a view to introducing the most handsome order possible into all branches of administration; I went out to visit the most beautiful sites in the world accompanied by the tutor of the children of the house, his two pupils, my walking stick, and my notebooks. My goal is to describe the sites I saw to you, and I hope these pictures will prove worthy of the others. (*Salons*, 3.129)

The opening paragraph of Diderot's account of Vernet is remarkable in a number of respects. First and foremost is its controlling fiction. Without

warning or explanation, Diderot pretends that he has abandoned the business of looking at paintings to go for a walk in the countryside by the sea, in the company of a pair of boys and the abbé who is their tutor. To be sure, even before we are brought to a halt before the first of the series of sites later identified as the first of Vernet's pictures, *The Abundant Spring* of 1766 (figure 50), we are already in a picture, one Diderot hopes will prove "worthy" of those he has apparently chosen not to describe.<sup>43</sup> We find ourselves indeed in a landscape whose scale and potential interior vantage points are mapped out for us by the *staffage* figures the abbé, his young charges, and Diderot himself represent.

The transition from exhibition hall to open countryside already betokens absorption – the painting's own absorption in the fiction that there is in fact no painting at all. But the gesture by which, in the very act of looking at the picture, Diderot makes it vanish underscores the way in which absorptive art absorbs the beholder as well. In the absence of the kind of theatrical cues needed to convey the discursive moral content that history paintings, devotional art, and even portraits invoke, obliging as well as inviting us to enter the world it depicts in search of the ready-made subject it lacks, Vernet's landscape transforms the beholder into a participant of the sort Diderot pretends to be.

However, just as important as this registration of the painting's absorptive character is the way the transition from salon to landscape transports us from the essentially urban lifestyle defining even country-house life of the opulent sort Diderot imagines to the fully natural world of which Vernet's landscape is the alienated echo.<sup>44</sup> Nor are Vernet and Diderot alone in urging this displacement. As the paragraph's long second sentence indicates, giving us an animated satire of the habits of the Parisian chattering classes in which Diderot was otherwise so comfortably at home, the passage develops a novelized version of the topos of the innocent joys of pastoral retreat.<sup>45</sup>

This is a distinctively Roman topos, largely unknown to the pre-Hellenistic Greeks of the Roman Empire, one of whose motives surely lies in the *Salon's* epigraph from the first chapter of Tacitus's *Annals*. Taking up the pen to recount the decadent horrors of life at the imperial court, the sardonic historian claims to stand at a tranquil distance from the events he relates in order to disclaim the distorting partisan anger direct involvement would have caused: *Sine ira et studio quorum causas procul habeo* (*Salons*, 3.65). In one sense then, Diderot's fiction enacts the fundamental inspiration behind the genre of landscape art of which it passes itself off as a member: withdrawal to a better, purer, greener world, far from the violent yet inconsequential obsessions of urban life, where communion with nature sets us free to experience truths city-dwellers so readily forget even when in the country. As he puts it later in the Promenade, expressly meditating on the pleasures of landscape art:



Figure 50. Claude-Joseph Vernet, *The Abundant Spring* (1766). Private collection; all rights reserved. Photo: courtesy of Stéphane Lojkine, University of Aix-Marseille.



Here is true life, the true abode of man; none of the advantages of society will ever suffice to extinguish its savor. Chained within the narrow walls of cities by tedious occupations and sad duties, if we cannot return to the forests that formed our first refuge, we sacrifice a portion of our opulence to summon up forests around our homes. [...] There, we counterfeit for a time the role of savages; slaves to polite usage and our passions, we play the pantomime of Natural Man. Utterly unable to give ourselves over to the chores and amusements of pastoral life, to wander in the countryside, to follow a flock, to live in a thatched cottage, we shower Wouwermans, Berghem, or Vernet with gold and silver, inviting them to use their brushes to retrace the history and mores of our ancient ancestors. And the walls of our sumptuous and sullen dwellings are covered with images of a happiness we look back to with regret. (*Salons*, 3.138–9)

The nostalgia Diderot identifies with landscapes points to a major purpose behind the apparent purposelessness of absorptive art, explaining in the process why, in place of the term Fried coins, Diderot talks of *le naturel*, *le nonchalant*, and *le naïf*. The byproduct is, as Fried insists, the autonomy art asserts, and so the ontology on which a specifically modern art comes to rest. Yet, as the epigraph from Tacitus hints, seconded by the emptiness of the urban world Diderot pretends to abandon in favour of the artless landscapes to which Vernet transports him, the emerging ontology of modern art responds to the demoralized determinisms of the modern world at large. Vernet's portrayal of landscapes absorbed in pure spontaneous being-there invites us to absorb ourselves in them in the way Diderot's fiction of wandering in the countryside orchestrates. The *Salon* thereby presents the aesthetic experience of unadorned nature as the way out of the metaphysical trap that Diderot's introductory satire of modern life depicts.

It is crucial to note just the same that the medium of escape here is not purely or simply pastoral. Nature is not merely adduced as an alternative to demoralized urban modernity. Nor is it enough just to go native in the way Vernet's landscapes, Chardin's genre vignettes, or even Greuze's moralized portraits of the bourgeois family appear to. This is and remains art after all, not nature; nor perhaps would we find it so absorbing if it were. The point rather, as Diderot's talk of metaphysics reminds us, is a certain idea of nature and the way that idea can be reconciled with still other ideas that the nature of modern life relegates to speciousness and irrelevance. We need in short to notice how Kantian this is even if, in the upshot, Diderot will take us down a path quite different from the one Kant chooses.

Though commentators on Kantian aesthetics generally hasten to apply it to the field of art, Kant himself mistrusted art, and it is worth pausing a moment

to ask why. The whole point of aesthetic experience for Kant, as also in part for Diderot, is to bear witness. As noted earlier, in the “reflective” mode of aesthetic judgment, as in that of the teleological judgments to which Kant turns in the latter half of the Third Critique, experience testifies that the limits encountered in the search for determinate knowledge are in fact only bounds. As such, they offer intimations of those providential purposes and meanings that the pursuit of knowledge obliges us to forgo in order to defeat the scepticism to which Humean empiricism leads. However, as for any witness summoned to give the evidence we need to reach a verdict, a problem of authentication arises. Under what conditions can aesthetic judgments be trusted to hand in true evidence, evidence we have no reason to doubt and from which we can therefore draw reliable inferences?

Kant solves the problem by carefully de-anthropomorphizing the grounds of aesthetic experience. Our purest and so most genuine experiences of beauty take nature for their object. This move both produces and elucidates the two most controversial of the four “moments” that define the category of the aesthetic. As we have seen, aesthetic judgments for Kant are reflective rather than determinative in that they lack the moral or cognitive concepts that would enable us to determine what they are, leaving us in a pleasurable state of open-ended wonder. They are also “subjective” in that each person judges for him- or herself, and yet “universal.” For unlike “judgments of sense” – a liking, say, for the taste of sherry, or a fondness for the colour blue – judgments of beauty implicitly claim not merely that I myself happen to like something but that everyone should. And this is true even if, as everyday experience readily teaches, there is no guarantee that I will ever persuade anyone to agree with me.

This much may readily be admitted: Kant says little here that Hume had not already said in his essay “Of the Standard of Taste” in 1757. For in Hume too judgments of beauty give us a pleasure we cannot quite justify or explain because they are strictly personal; and yet they suggest that some sort of objective standard must exist even if nobody has adduced one capable of surviving rigorous scrutiny or the test of time.<sup>46</sup> Where Kant breaks new ground is in arguing that the beautiful is the object of a liking wholly devoid of interest (*Judgment*, 43–53), and that it exhibits the form of “purposiveness without purpose” (*Judgment*, 64–84).

Both of these features of aesthetic judgments conform to the basic rules of evidence applied to witnesses in courts of law as an expression of the increasingly widespread culture of fact to which both Hume and Kant adhered.<sup>47</sup> In order to trust witnesses, we must determine that they have no interest in the case, and have no purpose beyond that of testifying as accurately and sincerely as they can. Applied to the matter in hand, this test leads Kant to distinguish between

purely (and so genuinely) aesthetic experiences and their artificial lookalikes. Our truest experiences of beauty take nature for their object; and they do so because, as the culture of fact to which we owe modern rules of evidence suggests, nature qua nature has neither interests nor purposes of any kind.

Seen in this light, art is exactly the wrong place to look for the testimony we want because such testimony as it might give is vitiated by the fact that, in its character as the product of human purposes and interests, what we find in it is a reflex of what we put into it, namely, the very testimony we seek. Only nature then proves capable of bearing the witness we need because, in the experimental realm in which our need arises, nature is blind mechanism bereft of interest and purpose alike. True, Kant has a lot to say about art, and especially about art of genius. But inasmuch as genius is an inborn (and to that extent purposeless and disinterested) power of grasping beauties and sublimities beyond the reach of the kind of routines Diderot stigmatizes in the preamble to the *Salon*, it becomes a surrogate for nature rather than an instrument of art. More precisely, genius is that power by which “nature gives the rule to art” such that art itself comes to life as nature when genius leads the way (*Judgment*, 174).

What Diderot both seeks and finds in absorptive art, and in particular in the specimens of absorptive art Vernet’s landscapes supply, is nature in this complex Kantian sense: one in whose light, in the teleological analysis of the second half of the Third Critique, nature “herself” comes to be seen as at once an artwork and as the artist who creates it (*Judgment*, 405–6).

Such is the thrust of the *Salon*’s description of the first site visited during Diderot’s fictional stroll in the country. Inevitably, since this is Diderot, the description is cast in the form of a dialogue between the writer and the abbé who serves as guide. Following an initial evocation of the scene in which Diderot teasingly characterizes the finer points of the landscape as touches art would have suggested, the abbé breaks in on his thoughts to ask:

“Which of your artists [...] would have imagined breaking the continuity of that rocky roadway with a tuft of trees?” “Vernet, perhaps.” “That may well be; but would your Vernet have imagined the elegance and charm those trees display? Would he have caught the effect of warmth and piquancy produced by the light that plays between their trunks and branches?” “Why not?” “Or catch the immense space your eye discovers in the distance?” “He has sometimes managed it. You don’t know that man – how far the phenomena of nature are familiar to him ...” (*Salons*, 3.130)

The dialogue continues in this vein until, exasperated by Diderot’s insistence that Vernet could have done everything his companion puts down to nature,

the abbé is driven to reveal what he really means in opposing nature to art as he does: “You can go on saying Vernet, Vernet, as much as you like. I won’t leave nature to go chasing after its image. However sublime man may be, he’s not God” (*Salons*, 3.131).

The ironies at play here are numberless. It is not just that what the abbé alleges to be nature, and so the handiwork of the Creator to whose benevolence it testifies, is in fact a work of art. As a character in Diderot’s dialogue, the abbé is one too. He is in fact a straight-man contrived to allow Diderot to score points about art, nature, and how they do and do not relate. But as the abbé’s invocation of the divine maker indicates, the more artfully in that, in doing so, he treats the holy name in unconsciously Spinozan-wise as a synonym for nature itself, beyond the question of art and its relation to nature is that of the relation of both to the providence the abbé’s faith in God promises. The sense of nature that the abbé asserts is the one the Reverend Holmes affirms at Saunderson’s deathbed. What he sees in nature, as a corollary of landscape’s natural beauty, is the proof from design alone capable of endowing it with the graces he and Diderot agree they find therein.

But the fact that the beauties the abbé adduces in proof of God’s existence are not only works of art but works of art in another work of art lays the basis for a refutation of his viewpoint. The theme of the refutation is the idea that induces the abbé, and Kant after him, to try to sidestep art altogether. Nature can only vouch for God insofar as it is nature rather than art: what enables nature to bear witness to God’s existence is the fact that, as nature, it is the product of blind mechanisms in which we discern no prejudicially guiding hand. For, as Kant himself understood, if nature were in truth the work of art the *Salon* hyperbolically intimates, it would hardly be surprising if it testified in the way the abbé wants it to since whoever made it would have designed it to do just that. Whence the Spinozan synonymy into which the abbé unconsciously falls: nature can only be seen as a work of God so long as we see it as the work of purposeless nature itself.

Diderot now sets about refuting this argument by staging a thought experiment that turns its terms inside out. The lead-in to the experiment is a return to the beauty of art, and more particularly to that of the Greek art whose status as a model for aesthetic imitation the preamble challenges. Diderot cites a series of canonical classical exemplars, the last of which, eschewing the usual Greek name, he calls “the Venus with the Beautiful Buttocks” in malicious vernacular token of the scurrilously natural appetites that dog our elevated heels (Figure 51). He asks the abbé if he does not find the Venus beautiful and, what is more, if he has ever seen anything in nature as “perfect” as she is. The abbé

is obliged to confess that he does find her beautiful and that no merely natural phenomenon rivals her perfection. Diderot then asks if he does not feel a thrill of pleasure when his young charges come out with a remark (*un mot*) worthy of one of Tacitus's deeper (and presumably darker) *sententiae*. And when the abbé concedes that he does, Diderot asks why: "It's because I take great interest in it. It's because the remark augurs a great sensitivity of soul, a depth of insight, a keenness of mind beyond their years" (*Salons*, 3.132).

The next question is why the promise such an utterance reveals proves so moving, a question Diderot frames by invoking an analogy with rolling dice (*Salons*, 3.132). Would the abbé be surprised, he asks, if he threw dice from a box and the same number came up each time? When the abbé acknowledges that he would, since the work of pure chance that rolling dice images could not be expected to produce that result, Diderot goes on to ask if he would still feel that way if he knew the dice were loaded. The answer in this case is no, since the result would no longer be the work of chance but a work of art, and so of the kind of "sensibility," "insight," and "keenness of mind" artworks demand.

The time is now ripe for Diderot's thought experiment. Diderot invites the abbé to imagine that the painter we know as Raphael is a machine. It is then in his character as a machine to produce works of art we call "Raphaels," endowed with all the graces and, further, all the traces of inimitable genius that appellation implies in exactly the way that loaded dice produce the same number, however long and hard we shake the box. The question now is, would we still find Raphael's paintings beautiful? And when the abbé replies that, no, we would not, Diderot presses the point by asking "but what about the machine" that produces Raphaels? Assuming its operation to be as "common" because purely mechanical as the one that produces the automatized result of loaded dice, it would be no more beautiful than the artworks it churns out. And yet even were we to know for a fact that Raphael really is a machine, how could we deny his paintings' beauty? To which the abbé replies, in something approaching panic, "But, by your principles, isn't Raphael just a picture-making machine?" (*Salons*, 3.132).

The force of this rejoinder stems from the dilemma on whose horns the poor abbé finds himself impaled. On the one hand he cries out against the implication that Raphael's works and, with them, Raphael himself as their creator, could be reduced to a mere mechanism. As Diderot goes on to put it, voicing the cleric's objection more clearly than the abbé is allowed to, even granting, *ex hypothesi*, that Raphael is a machine, the works he (or it) creates prove that the mechanical operation involved cannot be as "common" as the hypothesis makes out if only because what it produces are Raphaels, with all the sublimities that entails:



Figure 51. Anonymous, *Venus Kalipygos (Venus with the Beautiful Buttocks)*.

National Archaeological Museum, Naples. Photo: © Vanni Archive/Art Resource, NY.

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But the machine called Raphael was never common; nor are the works of this machine as common as oak leaves. It's just that, following a natural and almost invincible inclination, we assign to this machine a will, an intelligence, a design, freedom. (*Salons*, 3.132)

What the abbé is forced to concede he admires in Raphael's paintings and so, by extension, in Raphael himself are qualities presumed to flow from those powers of will, intelligence, purpose, and freedom that, following the "natural inclination" implicit in our spontaneous response, we assign them as the source of the beauty we find in them. What grants Raphael's paintings the beauty the abbé is reluctant to reduce to the operations of a machine is therefore the very artificiality he claims makes that kind of beauty inferior to the natural kind. And yet, as the earlier segment of their conversation has determined, what is nature itself if not a machine like that of Diderot's experiment – the machine it has to be to earn exemption from the artful humanity the abbé deprecates? And if nature is a machine, albeit one fashioned by the hand of God rather than some merely human artificer, in what does it differ from the experiment's Raphael? There is in fact nothing to choose here since, when you get down to it, if nature is a machine, so is Raphael if only because Raphael is as such a fact of nature by the same token as everything else in the natural world.

In Kant, beauty's witness is saved by distinguishing natural kinds from artistic lookalikes. In Diderot, it is saved by conflating the two. Diderot's hypothesis re-describes Raphaelesque creativity in terms of the natural mechanisms that produce natural beauty. If Raphaels are beautiful, and endowed moreover with a beauty the abbé resists defining as an artefact of the mechanical processes through which nature creates the beauties he claims to prefer to those of art, then he must do one of two things. He must either acknowledge that art is in fact superior to nature, thereby surrendering the hope of adducing natural beauty as a proof of God; or he must confess that there is in the end no difference between the two since both are products of pure natural operations. And is this not just what the abbé does in defending the superiority of the natural beauty that "God or Nature" generates against the artificial beauty Vernet's landscapes create? That this is indeed the thesis he has unwittingly espoused is driven home by the final step in the experiment, when the Raphaelesque painting machine is shown to be none other than the abbé's God himself:

Suppose that Raphael were eternal, motionless before the canvas, painting under ceaseless compulsion. Multiply imitative machines like this on all sides; cause pictures to be born in nature like the plants, trees, and fruits that are said to serve as their models, and tell me what would become of your admiration then. The  
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beautiful order that enchants you in the universe could not be other than it is.  
(*Salons*, 3.132)

Needless to say, the abbé is horrified by the vision towards which the Promenade's rhetoric has manoeuvred him by forcing him to assent to the logic of Diderot's argument every step of the way. The rapid twists and turns Diderot administers to notions of art and nature alike have so ravelled the case that it is hard to see what exactly the abbé agrees to. More specifically, in deploying the thought experiment of the painting machine in such a way as to transform art into a second-order version of nature conceived as blind mechanism, Diderot seems to have destroyed not only nature's testimony to a transcendent creative principle but art's as well.

No wonder then if at just this point, while Diderot rattles on like dice in a box, a Jobish whirlwind intervenes, blowing grit into the abbé's eye. Blinded as well as talked into a corner, the champion of orthodox piety is reduced to helpless silence. True, he is at length roused to indignant speech again when, adding insult to injury, Diderot assures him that the apparently random accident of getting grit in his eye was as inescapably necessary as everything else we observe in the natural order – including the abbé's own deterministically self-regarding insistence on seeing it as the work of malevolent chance (*Salons*, 3.136–7). But the abbé's resentment at Diderot's smug Spinozism merely underscores how far his injured eye drives out the providentialist view of nature he has defended. Whether he concedes, with Diderot, the proof of universal natural determinism or holds fast to complaint at a mischance that seems so only because he failed to see it coming, the wound to his eye dispels all thought of God's presiding hand.

I conclude by suggesting that the situation is not as demoralizing as a precipitous reading of the Promenade makes it appear. For one thing, the debate is interrupted by a new vista, the sequence's "second site," turning thought and conversation in a new direction. Painful as the moment may be – and getting grit in your eye is no laughing matter – life goes on in art and nature alike. But the crucial point is this. Diderot seems to have sacrificed the values of beauty, will, insight, purpose, and above all freedom on the altar of the naturalistic vision of art the account of Vernet's landscapes occasions, making all of these good things look like the mere effects of the mechanically produced artworks of which we prefer to see them as being the causes. In doing so, however, he also intimates that these effects, as effects, are nonetheless the very things we fear we have lost.

Just because they are only effects does not mean that they are not what we cherish them for being if only because, as both Spinoza and Kant teach, effects

become causes in their own right. It is simply that, rather than see them in the regressive light Kant elects, we should picture them as advancing the kind of invincible forward progress the word “freedom” implies. God, in the end, is the machine Diderot’s thought experiment posits because everything is a machine; and, as is true of all machines insofar as they are just that, God does, and can do, only what the natural laws that govern machines dictate. Still, the deterministic necessity Diderot argues for only appears to negate the open-endedness freedom promises. What we need to understand – what Diderot teaches – is the need to break the habit of looking at things backwards, along the regressive sightlines the illusion of final causes instills. As Spinoza insists even as he denies that, in addition to interests or purposes of any kind, God has any consciousness of the sort our own possession of that dubious gift induces us to assign him, he is nonetheless perfectly and indeed infinitely free. And what makes him free is the fact that, in his true identity as nature, that “substance” whose infinite range and power exclude the possibility of there being any other (*Ethics* 1p8), there is literally nothing to act on him that does not express what he is.

All of which goes to show that the mystery to which, groping in the dark, human beings give the name of God has not deserted us. It has simply been reconfigured to reveal its true form: that of the enigmatic self-absorption we meet in Chardin, Greuze, Vernet, and the works of properly modern art for which they open the door. But what is this if not a proclamation of the powers *persons* possess in the face of the almighty natural machinery that makes them what they are?

We have come a long way from the heroic picture of human potential encountered in Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. Pico’s quasi-divine “philosopher” has given way to the Enlightenment *philosophe*, and his magus to Diderot’s gamester. There is much to discourage us in the change. In the matter of taste in art, for instance, Diderot’s bouts of poetic high-mindedness readily accommodate his smutty liking for the *Venus with the Beautiful Buttocks*; and if anything justified Kant’s complaint about the “crooked timber of humanity,” it is the tortuous con-artistry to which Diderot’s well-meaning abbé succumbs. Diderot’s version of the human person does, though, have the distinct advantage of at least looking like a genuine human being. As we saw in the introduction, Pico’s philosopher was destined to break his nose on the granite of hard fact as ludicrously as Molière’s Sganarelle – the difference being that the latter may actually learn something from the experience. While the world makes us what we are, it is also what we in turn make of it for ourselves. And this is so because, even on the deterministic view Diderot borrows from Spinoza, human beings adapt and change as a direct expression of everything that happens to them.

In [chapter 1](#), we discovered how knowledge owes its shape to those who seek it as a reflex of the experimental interests, needs, and chances that drive them on. Person and truth, and so person and world, emerge as twin faces of a single dialectic in which each expresses the other, thereby making both real. In [chapter 2](#), Hoogstraten's perspective boxes were found to exploit this dialectic by turning the mental act of vision inside out in order to restore it to the outside world empirical psychology seems to leave behind. Then, in [chapter 3](#), both the self-emancipating truth of Raphael's portrait of Castiglione and the self-betraying truth of Vasari's portrait of Lorenzo il Magnifico showed how the autonomous Burckhardtian "individual" is in fact firmly anchored in the social environment from which it strives to stand apart in lofty isolation. The result however is not the loss of self Burckhardt or Nietzsche feared. It reveals self's core nature as a creature whose being is inseparable from its empowering as well as alienating social embeddedness.

This in turn helped us see, in [chapter 4](#), the emancipatory potential in the way in which the invisible hand of Jonson's anarchic marketplace transforms the world and its human inhabitants, making them both more just and happier than the prevailing myths of absolutist sovereignty would allow. And it also prepared [chapter 5](#)'s account of the broader implications of the way in which early modern theatre turns being into acting by showing how acting is a consequence of the events it helps unleash. Finally, in [chapter 6](#), Lafayette's experiment of beauty was seen to create at least the promise of escape from the social order whose alienating debasement it brings to light. Just because the *princesse de Clèves* is found to be a creature of her own inimitably virtuous imagination, she affirms our capacity to transcend the limits social existence sets if only by making those limits visible in a way they were not before.

All of these episodes in the early modern experiment of person argue for the kind of freedom Diderot paradoxically identifies with the blind causal forces that determine what we are. As we put it in the introduction, self is a four-dimensional phenomenon: the experience of mind, body, and social relation over time. The notion of person early moderns developed in order to describe the experiment of self is accordingly just as multiform and, above all, as subject to dramatic and even revolutionary change as the experimental beings they discovered they were. The downside is that person turns out to be a moving target. The upside is that it does in fact *move*, as often as not under its own impulsion. This is moreover, in every sense, a moral certainty, unhappy though it may have made someone as enamoured of absolutes as Kant. The best guess we make, the only one we can, is also the right one. Crooked is as straight as it gets.

## Conclusion

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# Person, Experiment, and the World They Made

*Paradise Lost* is one of the books which the reader admires and lays down, and forgets to take up again. None ever wished it longer than it is.

– Samuel Johnson

It feels odd, writing a conclusion to this book. For one thing, I am keenly aware of how much of the story I have been telling remains untold. It would demand a book at least as long again as the one I have already written. All sorts of stones remain to be turned over.

I would have liked to devote a chapter to autobiography, for example, and its various sub-genres and antecedents. Much needs to be said about Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* of course, but also his *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* and the tortured, proto-Dostoevskian self-arraignment, *Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques*. And I have also omitted the diary of Samuel Pepys, the memoirs of the duc de Saint-Simon, and their various fictional lookalikes, from Gatién de Courtilz de Sandras's *Memoirs of d'Artagnan* to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, together with the strange fictional reporting work conducted in the *Journal of the Plague Year*.

Mention of fictional memoirs puts me in mind of the novel generally. The picaresque deserved detailed analysis not only because it follows the doings of an individual person – all the more closely in that the central character usually tells the story for himself – but above all because of its rigorously experimental narrative procedures. In taking as its hero a rogue defined both by a pointed lack of moral scruple and by a singular capacity to adapt to a wide variety of callings and conditions, the picaresque enables fiction to explore the world in all its social complexity. It does so moreover by recounting the hero's life from start to finish, presenting him first as an innocent much of whose experience

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takes the form of what Alain-René Lesage's *Gil Blas* calls his progressive *déni-aisement* – experience is a string of dope-slaps teaching us to see things as they are. As early as the sixteenth century, then, we get something approaching a working model of Lockean empiricism wherein the initial blank slate of childhood receives a growing body of empirical impressions that add up not just to a life but to a fully formed (if conspicuously demoralized) adult consciousness. There is also Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, in which the “small accidents” of private life mingle with the Montaigne-like airing of often idiosyncratic private opinions in a book that, like the Gascon's essays, somehow becomes the man it labours to portray. Then too we have the great epistolary novels of Samuel Richardson, Choderlos de Laclos, and Rousseau, where the writing of letters tries to capture the stream of live emotion with as much immediacy as writing can afford. Or again we meet the abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* and *Wilhelm Meister* – books all the more intriguing for their indisputably realistic handling of the kind of psychological intricacies that Lafayette's *Princesse de Clèves* pioneered, as for their contribution to granting the tumbling episodic rhythms of picaresque the teleological focus of the *Bildungsroman*.

To chapters on the picaresque and fiction generally could have been added still others on broader features of the early modern experience of person. I have touched on the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility only in passing, and have had little to say about the associationist picture of self that *Tristram Shandy* exploits to seriously interesting as well as teasingly comic effect. I could also have written a good deal more about two themes close to the heart of Michael McKeon: the often melodramatic early modern sense of person as something fundamentally separate from the identities assigned by accident of birth and social circumstance; and the growing focus on domesticity as a central category of both communal and private experience.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps most of all I regret the lack of a chapter on emotion in the rationalized forms in which philosophers increasingly found themselves wrestling with it. The introduction offers fleeting mention of the early modern habit of drawing up inventories of the contents of the human experience of self. High on the list are the “passions” and “affections” that simultaneously animate and cripple personal agency. A paradigm of this typically early modern inventorial work is part 3 of Spinoza's *Ethics*. Like the exemplary rationalist he was, Spinoza sets out to derive the family of human emotions *more geometrico* from first principles – more specifically, from the dynamics of pleasure and pain at the root of all living things that expresses the conatus or inborn drive to preserve and expand one's private existence. The method yields successive pairs of complementary emotions, to start with love and hate, which form the baseline of human feeling.



What gives us pleasure we call good, and love; what causes displeasure we call evil, and hate. Similarly, a bit further downstream, hope is the pleasure we feel in the prospect of obtaining the good, and despair the pain experienced when good turns out to lie beyond our reach or evil proves inescapable.

The intriguing point is that, for all Spinoza purports to derive the emotions from first principles, uncompromised by the contingencies of direct affective experience, the inventory demands empirical verification by means of an act of inner inspection aimed at determining whether the emotions so diagnosed answer to experimental facts. Further, given Spinoza's encyclopedic ambitions, the inventory's adequacy depends on its completeness: the effort fails to the precise extent that we discover emotions Spinoza has overlooked, thereby putting the purely logical work of rational derivation in tense if productive dialogue with the experiments it is meant to control. For what happens when, guided by a reading of the *Ethics*, we chance on emotions that do not fit into Spinoza's scheme, or emotions for which we have no conventional names? What are we to be said to feel, for instance, when we undergo experiences of the sort the emergent literatures of private encounter trade in – experiences so novel, aberrant, or indigestible that we are unable to define let alone name them? Which, then, of the contents an inventory of the human mind brings to light leads the way: the faculty of reason that steers us towards the ultimate goal of Spinoza's emancipatory *amor Dei intellectualis*, or the happenstances of unmediated empirical discovery?

There is thus no shortage of fresh topics to pursue in the perspective this book has marked out. But, as Wittgenstein once observed, explanation has to stop somewhere, so I leave it to others to take up these matters, should they choose. Besides, as I indicated in the introduction, my aim here was less to say everything there is to say about person, experiment, and the world they made than to reformulate the terms in which these problems are typically discussed and to propose, on that basis, a series of test cases designed to try out the ideas I present. The book's goals have been theoretical and even philosophical as well as critical and historical, driving for greater clarity, veracity, and depth far more than compendious mastery of the terrain.

I have suggested that we need to rethink a number of key problems concerning the nature of knowledge, the nature of experience, the nature of self, and the language we use to describe them. In the process, I have also suggested, albeit only intermittently and rarely in so many words, that we need to reimagine our own tasks as readers and beholders. To take one example, what is required to elaborate a truer, more exact, more faithful interpretation of Jan Vermeer's *Young Woman with a Pearl Earring* than the ones earlier commentators have left us? Better concepts, of course. But also a richer and more dexterous

deployment of the broader cultural and intellectual contexts in which paintings like this appear at both ends of the historical transaction involved in looking at any artwork from the past: the one at which the work was first created and the one where we now turn to it for reasons that may have little to do with those that moved the painter. Doing greater justice to the *Pearl Earring* further demands a greater openness to the experimental character of the experience of art in general, if only in acknowledgment of art's own inherently experimental nature. Plays, novels, pictures, treatises not only represent the world; they intervene in it, changing it, and changing us even as we in turn change them by asking the questions we ask and by performing the trials and committing the errors that are integral to all acts of reading, viewing, and thought.

If I have got things right, or at least less wrong, it will not matter if I have not got *everything* right. As John Locke puts it,

'Tis of great use to the Sailor to know the length of his Line, though he cannot with it fathom all the depths of the Ocean. 'Tis well he knows, that it is long enough to reach the bottom, at such Places as are necessary to direct his Voyage, and caution him against running upon Shoals, that may ruin him. Our Business here is not to know all things, but those that concern our Conduct.<sup>2</sup>

The only real issue then is how we conduct ourselves. Do we, as readers, beholders, and commentators, give new life to the texts and images we address? And do we, what is more, take new life from them as we do so? If we do both of these things, we have done what the interlocking worlds of art, writing, and thought not only occasion but expect of us. And if not, what on earth was the point?

# Notes

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## Introduction

- 1 Molière, *Le Festin de pierre, ou Don Juan*, 3.1, in *Œuvres complètes*, 2.875. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in the book are mine.
- 2 On the exemplary case of the forger Annius of Viterbo, Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text*, chap. 3.
- 3 Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola, *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, esp. 133 and 137–43.
- 4 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Philip Edwards, 2.2.286–9.
- 5 Terence Cave, *Pré-histoires: Textes troublés au seuil de la modernité*, chap. 4. See too Vincent Carraud, *L'Invention du moi*, revisiting the broader impact of Pascal's neologism.
- 6 René Descartes, *Œuvres philosophiques*, ed. Ferdinand Alquié, 2.420; and Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Philippe Sellier, fragment 567.
- 7 Michel Foucault, *Le Souci de soi*, but also the late lecture series he taught at the Collège de France from 1980 to 1982, *L'herméneutique du sujet* and *Subjectivité et vérité*.
- 8 Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners*, trans. Edmund Jephcott.
- 9 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 73–4 and 103–4.
- 10 Compare with Carl Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, trans. G.L. Ulmen, 19, mourning the loss of the Christ-based sense of person as social “representation” precipitated by the triumph of modern “economistic” norms of identity.
- 11 On “common” experience, Peter Dear, *Discipline and Experience: The Mathematical Way in the Scientific Revolution*, 67–8 and 144–9, and “The Meanings of Experience,” in *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 3, ed. Katherine Park and Lorraine Daston, *Early Modern Science*, 106–31.

- 12 On “unnatural” events in the history of experimental science, Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750*, esp. chap. 6 on “strange facts,” and Dear, “The Meanings of Experience,” 108–11.
- 13 Timothy Hampton, *Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature*. Also, more recently, Alison Calhoun, *Montaigne and the Lives of the Philosophers: Life Writing and Transversality in the Essais*, which expounds Montaigne’s telling replacement of the exemplar theory of history with notions of “life writing” derived from Plutarch and Diogenes Laertius. As Calhoun demonstrates, Montaigne shifts attention from historical individuals’ fixed identities to their empirical diversity as beings whose motives and actions are inherently at odds both with whatever doctrines they publicly espouse and with the putatively determinate characters they are assumed to possess.
- 14 Dear, *Discipline and Experience*, 25; and Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability: A Philosophical Study of Early Ideas about Probability, Induction and Statistical Inference*, 2nd ed., chap. 4.
- 15 On Boyle’s experiments, Steven Shapin and Simon Shaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life*, chap. 2.
- 16 For a rich yet concise overview of natural philosophers’ debts to engineers, craftsmen, alchemists, and quacks, Pamela O. Long, *Artisan/Practitioners and the Rise of the New Science, 1400–1600*. For the colorful period term “virtuoso,” Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England*, 273.
- 17 For a recent, wonderfully probing, and humane account of the shift, Katherine Eggert, *Disknowledge: Literature, Alchemy, and the End of Humanism in Renaissance England*. We should also note that natural magic survived even among worldly experimentalists like Robert Hooke. However, it did so in a distinctly secularized form underwritten by the fact that, though “occult,” the forces into which natural magic tapped were understood to be no less natural for that.
- 18 In Bruno Latour, *Nous n’avons jamais été modernes: Essai d’anthropologie symétrique*, 50–3, crossing out the divine is a condition and byproduct of the constitution of what he regards as the illusion of “modernity.”
- 19 For Boyle’s conviction that natural philosophy and natural religion were reconciled, *A Discourse of Things above Reason* (1681) and *Reflections on a Theological Distinction* (1690); also Barbara J. Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact: England, 1550–1720*, 172–3.
- 20 But Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science*, 231–2.
- 21 For the classic period account, John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 135–43.
- 22 For a powerful critique, Ronald Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs*, chap. 2.

- 23 Hans Reichenbach, *Experience and Prediction: An Analysis of the Foundations and Structure of Knowledge*, chap. 1, esp. 3–16.
- 24 Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme*, esp. 336–42.
- 25 This is of course the point of departure for the analysis of language and language games inaugurating Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.
- 26 Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 167–93, and *A Culture of Fact*, 118–21, 126–8, 137–9, and 159–60.
- 27 For insistence on the orthopsychic discipline required to achieve (or at least approach) scientific objectivity, Gaston Bachelard, *La Formation de l'esprit scientifique: Contribution à une psychanalyse de la connaissance*, which treats of the psychic obstacles scientists have to overcome in order to do science properly, and *Le Rationalisme appliqué*, 65–81, where the term itself comes into play. The notion of this kind of mental self-discipline is of course a theme from Descartes's *Discourse on the Method* on, though it acquired fresh impetus in twentieth-century Paris in particular, in part in response to the reductive features of Foucauldian historicism, and in part thanks to Louis Althusser's appropriation of the institutional dimension of Bachelard's picture of scientific orthopsychism in dialogue with the thought of Lacan. See Joan Copjec, "The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan," 53–71. Also Harry Berger, Jr, *Fictions of the Pose: Rembrandt against the Italian Renaissance*, chaps. 7–9, who relates the problem to early modern portrait painting.
- 28 A desire to find a way to avoid talking about consciousness altogether seems to be the itch Daniel Heller-Roazen tries to scratch in his immensely learned yet deeply puzzling *The Inner Touch: Archaeology of a Sensation*. See, e.g., chaps. 18–19, where Leibniz's both anti-Cartesian and anti-Lockean theory of "small perceptions" and "apperception" puts consciousness on a seamless continuum with states of perfect unconsciousness nonetheless enlivened by the animal "inner touch" Aristotle called the "common" sense: the faculty or feature of conscious experience he invented to explain how the five normal ones converge to form images or ideas of single objects. What is strange about Heller-Roazen's book is that it fails to strike a balance between its encyclopedic historical ambition to touch on everyone who has ever said anything remotely interesting about the "inner touch" and the formulation of a perspicuously overarching argument.
- 29 The *locus classicus* for worry about this matter is Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*, esp. 197–229, where Bentham's Panopticon epitomizes the modern state as such.
- 30 Alain de Libera, *L'invention du sujet moderne*, 61–3. Also Vincent Descombes, *Le complément de sujet: Enquête sur le fait d'agir de soi-même*, and for a start the

introductory discussion of the “Querelle européenne du sujet,” 7–11. Both writers call into question the whole premise of debate, namely, that, while we may argue about when it came into being and whether it has the unity, transparency, and sovereignty traditionally assigned it, there just is something called “the subject.” Both writers also make a point of tracking the term “subject” back to its grammatical roots – de Libera in the way we have just seen, Descombes by underlining its embeddedness in the grammar of action verbs. Yet both continue to take the notion seriously, with the result that each in his own way winds up entangled in all of the difficulties he intends to leave behind. This is especially surprising in Descombes’s case given how clearly he initially seems to see the problem as just the kind of sterile puzzle or mental knot he cites Wittgenstein as seeking to unravel. Meanwhile, for a parallel dislike for the term “subject” as applied in a specifically early modern French context, see Michael Moriarty, *Early Modern French Thought: The Age of Suspicion*, 10–13.

- 31 This last point, concerning how assigned qualities may become as intrinsic to their recipient as inherent ones, may seem a puzzling mixture of realism and social constructionism. I endorse, rather, the view John Searle presents in *The Construction of Social Reality*, with supporting echoes in Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* The placement of the adjective “social” in Searle’s title is key. We do indeed construct social realities: language, public institutions and identities, laws, money, and so on. This does not however turn them into mere fictions of the sort the notion of the *social* construction of reality often persuades us to take them for.
- 32 Descombes misses this point in his otherwise illuminating *Le complément de sujet*. In latching on to the term’s use as a grammatical marker for the agent of a reported action, he loses sight of its use in marking the patient in passive constructions like “I’m hit.” Both forms speak to the sense and experience of self in ways that make his emphasis on self-determined agency incomplete and problematic. No special ontological privilege attaches to either form. I do do things and so initiate happenings. But things also just happen, as often as not to me. The grammar of first-person passive constructions thus has as much to say about “the subject” as the grammar of active ones.
- 33 Émile Benveniste, “De la subjectivité dans le langage,” in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, 258–66.
- 34 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 135–61.
- 35 For Hobbes, Descartes, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 2.600–2; for Gassendi, *ibid.*, 2.708–23.
- 36 Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *Complete Works*, pt. 1, props. 1–14.
- 37 *Ibid.*, pt. 2, props. 11, 13, and 23.
- 38 Louis Althusser, “Idéologie et appareil idéologique d’État (AIE),” 67–125.



- 39 This point sheds light on the special case of Anglo-American philosophers in the analytic tradition. With notable exceptions, among them Thomas Nagel, they are far less prone to subject-talk than their Continental counterparts. See, e.g., Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, which discusses problems of action, agency, will, and intention without using the term “subject” at all, as too *Subjective*, *Intersubjective*, *Objective*, which not only reprints an important essay on “the myth of the subjective” but systematically speaks of “mind” in preference to alternatives like consciousness, person, self, etc. True, Derek Parfit devotes some pages to the “subject of experiences” in *Reasons and Persons*, 223–6. But he does so in order to focus on the baseline, pre-reflexive, and so pre- or even sub-personal states of awareness that accompany immediate sensation in order to consider what contribution these make to our overarching sense of ourselves as individual persons. Nevertheless, as Davidson points out, analytic philosophers are just as addicted to notions of “subjectivity” (and so “objectivity”) whose conceptual source is just “the subject” and everything we have come to associate with it. What they avoid in shutting the window of one term comes back through the open door of the other.
- 40 This helps explain why, as Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison observe, “objectivity” as we know it did not fully arise until the nineteenth century. See *Objectivity*.
- 41 The Foucauldian and Lacanian conflation of philosophical and political uses of the term “subject” has been a mainstay of early modern criticism and historiography for decades. For signal examples, Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body*; Mitchell Greenberg, *Subjectivity and Subjugation in Seventeenth-Century Drama and Prose*; Richard Helgerson, *Adulterous Alliances*; and Joan DeJean, *The Reinvention of Obscenity*. On a broader historical landscape, the work of Judith Butler falls into this category as well.
- 42 Like many others before me, I borrow the term “habitus” from the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, as advanced especially in *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique* and *Ce que parler veut dire: L’économie des échanges linguistiques*. Since Bourdieu joins Foucault and Lacan in authorizing the  $S1 = S2$  equation discussed earlier, embracing his term may seem to undercut my defence of person. However, as I hope the rest of this book will show, the human capacity to take on a socially conditioned habitus goes hand-in-hand with the human capacity to critique and change it. Nor is this a uniquely human trait, as anyone who has spent time observing the constantly shifting social performances and relationships of dogs and horses will know.
- 43 Suspicion of definite articles is inherent to the theory of language games in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, one of whose guiding themes is that meaning is use, and use only occurs in specific contexts in order to refer to specific things, human or otherwise. J.L. Austin draws comparable lessons in “The Meaning of a Word” and “Truth,” 23–43 and 85–101.

- 44 Michael McKeon comments on the comparable tension between general and particular in the evolving use of the terms “public,” “private,” and “domestic” in *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge*. See esp. his methodological conclusions, xxiii–vi.
- 45 On the “subject of civility,” Barbara Correll, *The End of Conduct*. On self-fashioning, Stephen Greenblatt’s classic *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. For a more nuanced picture, Harry Berger, Jr., *The Absence of Grace*. Lorraine Daston links civility to natural-philosophical objectivity in “Baconian Facts, Academic Civility, and the Prehistory of Objectivity,” 337–64, as does Steven Shapin in *A Social History of Truth*.
- 46 For all its intelligence and interpretive tact, Victoria Kahn’s wonderful *Wayward Contracts: The Crisis of Political Obligation in England, 1640–1674*, illustrates the damage subject-talk does. Kahn’s topic is what she calls “the contracting subject” that emerges in seventeenth-century England during and in the immediate aftermath of the English Civil War and the Stuart Restoration. A first consequence of her use of this term is confusion about what the word “subject” refers to at any moment: the political “subject of the Crown” or a form or state of consciousness? She is, I think, clearly aware that these are importantly different things. However, the difference goes unmentioned, and so undeveloped. She is also aware that, at least as used to describe the successor to her own “contracting subject,” i.e., “the liberal subject” of nineteenth-century political experience, the word is unhelpfully abstract. As she remarks in the introduction when insisting on the anachronism involved in uncritically identifying seventeenth-century contractual agents with their liberal descendants, “the secular, protoliberal [...] subject of modern contract theory” is “linguistically and phenomenologically thin.” As such, it sheds little light on the thick social, rhetorical, and psychological intricacies of the ways in which early moderns thought about contracts and the role they saw contracts as playing in political life (21). The problem of course is that Kahn’s preferred term, “the contracting subject,” is just as thin as the alternative, and so just as useless. The great strength of Kahn’s analysis lies in fact in her attention to linguistic and phenomenological thickness – to what I myself propose we should call the experimental *work* performed by the historical *persons* with whose writings and thought she engages.
- 47 Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century*, chap. 1.
- 48 Desmond M. Clarke, *Descartes: A Biography*, chap. 9, and Erec R. Koch, *The Aesthetic Body: Passion, Sensibility, and Corporeality in Seventeenth-Century France*, 48–56 and 58–67.
- 49 I depart here from the example of Timothy J. Reiss, *Mirages of the Self: Patterns of Personhood in Ancient and Early Modern Europe*. While I admire Reiss’s capacious learning, and endorse his emphasis on the “passibility” of ancient and early modern selves, i.e., their openness to multiform influences emanating from the many

concentric “circles” of embeddedness in the social as well as natural cosmos, his core attachment to self rather than person leads him to focus everything through the experience of private innerness. This focus seems largely derived from his attachment to Descartes, to whom he has devoted a great deal of time and energy over his long and illustrious career.

- 50 For a fuller analysis of this fragment, see Christopher Braider, *Baroque Self-Invention and Historical Truth: Hercules at the Crossroads*, 156–61.
- 51 For Locke’s account of memory’s role in determining the sense of personal identity, *Essay*, 335. For his critique, David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 299–311. For Parfit’s self-described “reductionist” account of person, *Reasons and Persons*, pt. 3, esp. chaps. 10–11. Also Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, chaps. 1–4.
- 52 I say the body, and not just the brain, which is something of a fetish in analytic accounts. See, e.g., Putnam’s “brain in a vat” thought-experiment in *Reason, Truth and History*, 1–21; Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 273–4, and *passim*; and Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 40–51.
- 53 Marie-Madeleine Pioche de La Vergne, comtesse de Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves*, 317.
- 54 Molière, *Don Juan* 4.1, where Don Juan threatens to bullwhip Sganarelle, and Pascal, *Sellier* 393: “Are you less of a slave for being loved and flattered by your master? You are certainly doing well, slave; your master flatters you. He will beat you anon.”
- 55 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 112.
- 56 E.g., Nicolas Faret, *L’Honnête-homme, ou l’art de plaire à la Cour*, 209 and 218.
- 57 Locke, *Essay*, 346–7.
- 58 Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol*, 31.
- 59 On the relevance of the three persons of the Trinity, Roberto Esposito, *Two: The Machine of Political Theology and the Place of Thought*, chap. 2, on “the dispositif of person.” Crucial to Esposito’s case is the conviction that the hypostatic conception of person is foundational to the Western sense of self as “the place of thought” in general, and that the triune picture of the theologians ultimately collapses to the two persons prefigured in the book’s title, Father and Son. In addition to dissenting from his emphasis on person as seat of thought or consciousness, I find his account of the theological underpinnings unhelpful on two counts. First, Esposito’s reduction of the Trinity to two terms strikes me as wholly arbitrary, not least because, as I see it, the third person of the Holy Spirit models the essential mobility that enables the hypostases to avoid overdetermined collapse into fixed identities, and most especially those two whose quasi-elemental opposition Esposito takes to define the inescapable poles at the root of all possible personhood. Second, and as EBSCO Publishing : eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 3/5/2023 9:39 PM via RUSSIAN STATE LIBRARY  
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both a consequence of and, I suspect, a goad to the first, Esposito winds up with a notion of person grounded in the dynamics of retribution. The focus on retribution explains his predictably dark reading (112–18) of the forensic model of person Locke derives from contract law: a reading that turns the responsibility that enables persons to originate as well as answer for their deeds into the accountability that entitles a higher (mythically patriarchal) authority to punish them for those deeds. Theological person thus licenses a picture of person as a (mythically filial) sacrifice on the altar of (mythically patriarchal) Law of the sort Esposito's compatriot Giorgio Agamben paints in his relentlessly (if also fashionably) gloomy *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, where we are taught, in that book's final chapter, that the *nomos* or founding elemental myth of modern life is the concentration camp.

- 60 Hélène Merlin-Kajman, *L'Absolutisme dans les lettres et la théorie des deux corps: Passions et politique*.
- 61 Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 28–30.
- 62 Hacking, *Representing and Intervening*, chap. 1.
- 63 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 3–42; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, esp. chaps. 8 and 9 on Descartes and Locke respectively; and Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy & History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience*, esp. pt. 3, “The Camp as Biopolitical Paradigm of the Modern.”
- 64 Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, esp. chaps. 1–3. Also Matthew C. Hunter, *Wicked Intelligence: Visual Art and the Science of Experiment in Restoration London*, updating and modifying Alpers's view of Hooke in particular and of the relations between visual art and experimental philosophy generally.
- 65 Berger used the phrase in a conference on early modern Dutch visual culture at Yale University in February 2002, where he presented material later published in *Caterpillars: Reflections on Seventeenth-Century Dutch Still Life Painting*.
- 66 On Burckhardt and Nietzsche, Lionel Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt: A Study in Unseasonable Ideas*, chaps. 11 and 14.
- 67 Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture*, chap. 2, and Berger, *Fictions of the Pose*, chap. 3.
- 68 C.S. Peirce, “Issues in Pragmatism,” in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, 349.
- 69 Timothy Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy: Literature and Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe*, 62, citing Alberico Gentili's *De legationibus libri tres* (1585). Also, for the classic study of these issues, Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*.
- 70 The theme begins to emerge in the latter portions of Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, where the author describes how the often hideously cruel physical forms

of punishment characteristic of early modernity give way to nineteenth-century efforts to constrain, retrain, and impose régimes of psychic *dressage* not only in prisons but also (and concomitantly) in factories, mental hospitals, and schools. Foucault went on to extend and deepen the analysis in *La volonté de savoir*, the first of his projected multi-volume history of sexuality, and esp. in *La naissance de la biopolitique*.

- 71 Steve Pincus, 1688: *The First Modern Revolution*.
- 72 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 2.560–1.
- 73 See Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*; and Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*.
- 74 Esposito, *Two*, esp. chap. 1 and the concluding discussion of “sovereign debt,” 203–9. For his coinage of the term “modern disenchantment,” Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, 270.
- 75 Pierre Corneille, *Discours de la tragédie*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, 168–9.
- 76 Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 39.

## 1 The Shape of Knowledge: The Culture of Experiment and the Byways of Expression

- 1 Christopher Braider, *The Matter of Mind: Reason and Experience in the Age of Descartes*.
- 2 Michel Foucault, *L'Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, 56–9. On the oddly conventional presuppositions underpinning Foucauldian periodization and the historical reconstructions it sustains, Andrea Frisch, “Rompre avec le passé: Foucault et l'historiographie de la rupture,” in *Foucault et la Renaissance*, ed. Olivier Guerrier.
- 3 Key here is the final chapter of the *Essais*, “De l'expérience,” *Les Essais*, 1111–67. For a detailed reading, Braider, *The Matter of Mind*, 21–30. Also Andrea Frisch, “Cannibalizing Experience in the *Essais*,” in *Montaigne after Theory, Theory after Montaigne*, ed. Zahi Zalloua, 180–201.
- 4 Montaigne, “De l'expérience,” *Essais*, 1111.
- 5 Descartes, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 2.423–6.
- 6 Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory*, 198–9.
- 7 On the critique of experience in seventeenth-century French thought generally, Michael Moriarty, *Early Modern French Thought*. A curious feature of Moriarty's account is a heavy list towards Catholic doctrine in its Jansenist and Oratorian forms, reinforced in *Early Modern French Thought II: Fallen Nature, Fallen Selves*, whose subtitle indicates how selectively he reads French thought in the period.
- 8 E.g., Montaigne, “De l'expérience,” and Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, appendix to part 1, in *Complete Works*, 241–2.

- 9 Blaise Pascal, *Entretien avec M. de Sacy sur Epictète et Montaigne: Original inédit*, 124.
- 10 For Antoine Arnauld's objection, Descartes, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 2.652.
- 11 *Le Monde, ou Traité de la lumière* in Descartes, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 1.315–76, begins with analyses of light, heat, and bodies before offering a "description of a new World, and of the qualities of the matter of which it is composed" (1.343). This world is purely hypothetical, and is chiefly designed to demonstrate how Descartes can explain the emergence of a complete physical system using only the a priori principles he stipulates. However, this "new" world turns out to contain all the major features of the real one, proving the truth of Descartes's a priori reasoning by adducing the evidence of our own eyes.
- 12 John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 23 and chap. 2.
- 13 Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 27. See too the same author's later *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*, where the "dual aspect" dualism adapted from Cartesian epistemology leads to a speculative panpsychism designed to suggest how mind may in fact have been built into the fabric of the physical universe from the start.
- 14 For a recent critique of the notion of timeless laws from within physics, Lee Smolin, *Time Reborn: From the Crisis in Physics to the Future of the Universe*. For the early modern origin of the notion, Margaret Wilson, "From Limits to Laws: The Construction of the Nomological Image of Nature in Early Modern Philosophy," in *Natural Law and Laws of Nature in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Michael Stolleis, 13–28.
- 15 On "Molyneux's problem," Michael J. Morgan, *Molyneux's Question: Vision, Touch and the Philosophy of Perception*, and Jessica Riskin, *Science in the Age of Sensibility: The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment*, chap. 2.
- 16 For the terms of the experiment, Étienne Bonnot, abbé de Condillac, *Traité des sensations*, 2 vols., 1.iii–vi.
- 17 Condillac addresses these matters most fully in the *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines*. Pt. 1, chap. 1, argues for the "real distinction" between body and soul. Condillac asserts that the soul's mental as well as physical dependence on the body results from Original Sin. He then shows how this dependence indicates that the body could not by itself rise to knowledge except thanks to an inherent power of reflection that, in unifying the multifarious perceptions delivered through each of our separate senses, reveals an underlying unity that belongs to none of them. For a complementary analysis, Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self*, 171–87. Also Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch: Archaeology of a Sensation*, 221–8. Oddly, given that his book surveys accounts of the inner, "common" sense that, from Aristotle to the present, has been variously credited with producing a unified



intuition by synthesizing the disparate inputs of our five senses, Heller-Roazen does not take up Condillac's reflections on spirit.

- 18 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 46.
- 19 Robert Boyle, "New Pneumatical Experiments About Respiration," *Philosophical Transactions* 62–3. As reproduced in *The Works of Robert Boyle*, 14 vols.. I cite the electronic edition, *Volume 6: Publications of 1668–71*, 216–17.
- 20 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 121–30, and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 58–74.
- 21 Peter Dear, *Discipline and Experience: The Mathematical Way in the Scientific Revolution*, 15.
- 22 Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. Paul Carus, extensively revised by James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977), 5.
- 23 For critiques of epistemology's primacy, Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, and Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs*. Note however that Dworkin's target is theory of knowledge as defined with natural science as its core exemplar. A major theme in his book is accordingly disentangling moral epistemology from the natural-scientific kind. See, e.g., chap. 2, on "truth in morals."
- 24 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 24 and 28.
- 25 For a recent defense of this whiggish view, Steven Weinberg, *To Explain the World: The Discovery of Modern Science*.
- 26 Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 185.
- 27 Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability*, chaps. 4 and 5. For a rich continuation of the story, see Lorraine Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment*. But note Daston's analysis in chap. 2 of the primacy of rational "expectation" as defined by "the reasonable man" in "classical" probability theory, i.e., before the frequencies adduced by statistical science in the nineteenth century.
- 28 Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability*, 32–3. Also Andrea Frisch, *The Invention of the Eyewitness: Witnessing and Testimony in Early Modern France*.
- 29 For a recent, concise survey, Pamela O. Long, *Artisan/Practitioners and the Rise of the New Sciences, 1400–1600*.
- 30 Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact*, 12–21.
- 31 This observation puts a fresh (if modest) spin on a famous theory. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, notes the "circularity" with which, when paradigm shifts occur, each group involved "uses its own paradigm to argue in that paradigm's defense" (94). The result is a dialogue of the deaf that ends only once debate has been resolved in favour of the new paradigm. A corollary is that genuine debate (as against uncomprehending cross-talk) can only take place on the grounds the new paradigm lays down. For the problem is not just the contrast between two rival paradigms but the fact that each paradigm inhabits a different

world – the one whose horizon underwrites the intelligibility of the problems and methods the winning paradigm identifies as relevant. The concessions Kant had to make to engage with (rather than merely shout at) Hume neatly illustrate the point.

- 32 Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, chaps. 1 and 5.
- 33 Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 33 for natural philosophy and 180–2 for law. Also Harry G. Frankfurt, *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen: The Defense of Reason in Descartes's Meditations*, for what seems to me the optimistic view that, for all his apparent absolutism, Descartes pursued a comparable notion of reasonableness grounded in the coherence of the evidence assembled to support the rational certainty of his intuitions.
- 34 On identification and re-identification, esp. in the context of the interpretation of texts, Joseph Margolis, *Interpretation Radical but Not Unruly: The New Puzzle of the Arts and History*, 26–8.
- 35 Hacking, *Representing and Intervening*, esp. chaps. 1, 9, and 16.
- 36 For a wonderfully rich analysis of Hobbes's objections to Boyle's work, see Shapin and Schaeffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*, chap. 4. The 1st ed. contains a translation of the *Dialogus physicus* in an appendix (345–91).
- 37 Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability*, chap. 3. Also Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 33–4.
- 38 It is nonetheless telling, *contra* Plato, how, in the series of fragments on “the reason of effects,” Pascal was prepared to argue that, from a strictly human point of view, Thrasymachus is self-evidently right. See Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Philippe Sellier, fragments 115–36.
- 39 Plato, *The Republic* 336a–54b, trans. F.M. Cornford, 15–39. Also *Phaedrus* 261a–2c, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, 55–8, where Socrates plays the same trick on the Sophists by convincing Phaedrus that only someone who knows the truth can successfully manipulate the opinions of the assembly or the judges in a law court.
- 40 Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability*, chap. 2.
- 41 Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study of the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*.
- 42 *La Correspondance de Nicolas Poussin*, ed. Charles Jouanny, 462.
- 43 For extended discussion, Braider, *The Matter of Mind*, 73–6.
- 44 *La Correspondance de Nicolas Poussin*, 143. For extended discussion, Braider, *The Matter of Mind*, 76, 82, 87.
- 45 Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, esp. chaps. 1–3. Note that, in contrasting Dutch art with that of the Italianate South, Alpers drifts from her initial Baconian model towards a crypto-Cartesian

sense of disembodiment mediated by the mechanical one she believes Northern painters adopted in their conception and practice of point of view.

- 46 Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity*, esp. chap. 3.
- 47 Matthew C. Hunter, *Wicked Intelligence: Visual Art and the Science of Experiment in Restoration London*, 39–43.
- 48 Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, chap. 3.
- 49 Yet Alpers is perceptive about the role of markets, commissions, and craft traditions in the Dutch Golden Age. See *The Art of Describing*, 110–18, and *Rembrandt's Enterprise: The Studio and the Market*, esp. chap. 4. For Southern parallels, see Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, chap. 1, and Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters: A Study of the Relations between Italian Art and Society*. For a more recent take on the Dutch situation, see Christopher D.M. Atkins, *The Signature Style of Frans Hals: Painting, Subjectivity, and the Market in Early Modernity*, chaps. 3–4.
- 50 On the pervasiveness of sexual symbols and the repertoire of vices (esp. drinking and smoking) with which they were associated, see Simon Schama, *An Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, 188–220.
- 51 On chance in Pascal, see Laurent Thirouin, *Le hasard et les règles: Le modèle du jeu dans la pensée de Pascal*. On Pascalian creaturality more widely, see Hall Bjørnstad, *Créature sans créateur: Pour une anthropologie baroque dans les Pensées de Pascal*. Also note how deeply Nagel's resistance to the "materialist neo-Darwinian conception of nature" is grounded in horror at the role he sees it as according pure brute contingency in the emergence of consciousness, and so knowledge. See, e.g., *Mind and Cosmos*, 50, where he symptomatically asks "how much would have to be added to the physical story to produce a genuine explanation of consciousness – one that made the appearance of consciousness, as such, intelligible, as opposed to merely explaining the appearance of certain physical organisms that, as a matter of fact, are conscious?"
- 52 For a wonderful account of early modern tragedy from the standpoint of both the representation of *pathos* or suffering and its emotional impact on readers and audiences, see Blair Hoxby, *What Was Tragedy? Theory and the Early Modern Canon*.
- 53 John Donne, "Elegie: Going to Bed," in *The Complete Poetry*, ed. John T. Shawcross, 58.
- 54 Three books underscore Donne's stress on the inescapable worldliness of human desires. Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance*, is a delightfully readable invitation to think about the Renaissance less as the high-flying spiritual and artistic adventure familiar from traditional textbooks than as the triumph of the new consumerism made possible by world trade, merchant banking, and

proto-industrialization. Jardine's *Ingenious Pursuits: Building the Scientific Revolution* does the same for early modern natural philosophy. Finally, in *Painting and Experience*, chap. 2, on “the period eye,” Baxandall describes how *quattrocento* painters drew on the visual skills and interests of the merchants who patronized their work to help them produce the illusion of space, volume, tactility, and weight needed to create convincing pictorial counterparts of the material forms of everyday life.

- 55 For Bacon's idols and their adaptation by his experimentalist followers, see Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, bk. 1, aphorisms 38–67, and Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 61–70.
- 56 Descartes, *Le Monde*, chap. 1. On his evolving sense of the brain's role in perception, see Desmond M. Clarke, *Descartes's Theory of Mind*.
- 57 I do not suggest that Descartes was a “veil of ideas” sceptic. On this point, Margaret Wilson, *Descartes*, chap. 6, and *Ideas and Mechanism: Essays on Early Modern Philosophy*, chaps. 1–2, are conclusive. My point rather is that Descartes opens the door for this mode of scepticism, whether he himself walked through it or not.
- 58 Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, chap. 1. Duncan Jones's *Source Code* (2011) is particularly intriguing since it is premised on putting Putnam's “brain in a vat” experiment to practical use.
- 59 On the ongoing place of humoral psychology in the age of Descartes, Erec R. Koch, *The Aesthetic Body: Passion, Sensibility, and Corporeality in Seventeenth-Century France*, esp. 25–48. Also helpful is Michael Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton*.
- 60 On probability's escape from rhetoric, see Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability*, chap. 3, and Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 3–10. On the historical character of the concept of fact, see Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*, 7–16 and 28, and Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact*, intro. Also Lorraine Daston, “Baconian Facts, Academic Civility, and the Prehistory of Objectivity,” 337–64, and “Objectivity and the Escape from Perspective,” 597–618, and Dear, *Discipline and Experience*, 13–14.
- 61 Dear, *Discipline and Experience*, 42–6.
- 62 This bears on Hacking's discussion of experimentation and scientific realism in *Representing and Intervening*, chap. 16. As he points out, while it is true that many purely “hypothetical” entities inferred from or postulated by some theory may never be directly observed, and so proved to exist by that most direct of means, they nonetheless become real the moment scientists use them in experiments – for instance, by spraying them at some other entity in order to modify the latter's behaviour in some measurable way.

- 63 On disentangling truth from *the* truth, see Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy*, 63–6.
- 64 The problem here parallels the one John Searle confronts in reviewing Christof Koch, *Consciousness: Confessions of a Romantic Reductionist*, in “Can Information Theory Explain Consciousness?” in *The New York Review of Books* for 10 January 2013. Koch argues that consciousness not only encodes, deploys, or interprets but just is information. Searle argues that this cannot be right for the simple reason that information is “observer relative.” Whatever its formal or physical source or embodiment, it only exists as information for a conscious someone capable of seeing it that way. I suggest that facts, knowledge, and truth are also observer-relative phenomena. However, as Searle would agree, this does not make them fictions or inventions; it merely clarifies their ontological status.
- 65 For extended analysis of the risks and distortions as well as insights associated with talk of social construction, see Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?*, esp. chap. 1.
- 66 Jean de La Rochefoucauld, *Réflexions ou Maximes morales*, max. 218. For Williams’s adaptation, *Truth and Truthfulness*, 135.
- 67 On this point, see Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution*, 71–3.
- 68 Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact*, chap. 2.
- 69 But note Poovey’s difficulties. Working the kind of paradoxes humanists love (and most natural scientists hate), she argues that “[i]nstead of gaining prestige from numbers” thanks to its hard-headed factual accuracy, “double-entry bookkeeping helped confer cultural authority” on them. “It did so by means of the balance, which depended [...] on that wholly fictitious number – the number imported not to refer to a transaction but simply to rectify the books” (54). Because the balance “depended on a sum that had no referent” since that sum was “the number simply added to produce the balance [...], the rectitude of the system as a whole was a matter of formal precision, not referential accuracy” (55). Quite apart from the fact that it is hard to see how double-entry bookkeeping could have conferred a new cultural status on numbers if it failed to deliver the goods, Poovey’s notion that the balance is “wholly fictitious” seems odd. True, unlike other numbers in a merchant’s ledgers, the balance does not refer to a specific transaction. But this does not mean that it is “imported,” conjured up out of thin air for the sole purpose of “rectifying” the books by squaring our accounts. The number in question represents the difference between debits and credits; and we obtain it not by some act of numerical prestidigitation but simply by subtracting the smaller sum from the larger one. The result is not just that our books are balanced: we learn what the balance is as a matter of fact.
- 70 Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact*, esp. 30–3, 37–42, 63–5, and 79–85.

- 71 Christopher Hill, *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries*.
- 72 Gaston Bachelard, *L'Eau et les rêves: Essai sur l'imagination de la matière*, 213.
- 73 See Marcel Gauchet, "L'État au miroir de la raison d'État: La France et la chrétienté," in *Théoriciens et théories de la raison d'État au XVI<sup>e</sup> et au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, ed. Yves-Charles Zarka, 195.
- 74 Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J.I. Parker and O.R. Johnston, 102. Translation slightly altered.
- 75 Bjørnstad, *Créature sans créateur*, 23–32.
- 76 Shapin and Shaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*, 2nd ed., chaps. 3 and 4.
- 77 Ibid., chaps. 4 and 7, and the book's memorable close: "As we come to recognize the conventional and artifactual status of our forms of knowing, we put ourselves in a position to realize that it is ourselves and not reality that is responsible for what we know. Knowledge, as much as the state, is the product of human actions. Hobbes was right" (344). However, on the occasion of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, marking in his eyes a refutation of the great critical-idealist tradition of European thought since Kant and Hegel, this statement provoked Bruno Latour's ireful *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*. Latour argues that the debate between Hobbes and Boyle enacts the "double divide" (the *double partage*) that founds our sense of the modern by drawing a bright line between nature and culture. Boyle contributes from the natural side by using empirical experiment to detach natural phenomena from the world of human norms, interests, and debates – everything that defines politics. Hobbes contributes from the social side by urging that everything, natural science included, must be subservient to the state in order to rescue us from the barbarous "state of nature." The result misrepresents what the Hobbes-Boyle debate actually made manifest: a rigid conceptual division that makes the "hybrid" reality unintelligible. Latour exaggerates the depth of the divide in that, in his hyperbolic desire to rid us of self-congratulatory philosophical and scientific fantasies, he remains stuck on the same plane of abstraction as his adversaries. As Hacking reminds us, scientists are above all realists, especially when not engaged in countering what they see as the libels that a science studies scholar like Latour publishes about their work. I do, however, agree with Latour that Hobbes was not in fact right, as indeed the outcome of his debate with Boyle and the Royal Society showed. But Latour also believes that Boyle was just as wrong, and that is where he goes too far.
- 78 Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*.

## 2 The Art of the Inside Out: Vision and Expression in Hoogstraten's *Peepshow*

- 1 Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley. Citations of the *Ethics* appear henceforth in parentheses in the text, and EBCO Publishing : eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 3/5/2023 9:39 PM via RUSSIAN STATE LIBRARY  
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take the now standard form. The part number is followed by lowercase initials indicating (in order) proposition plus number, proof (plus proof number if required), corollary (plus number if required), scholium (plus number if required), and then page numbers, set off by a semi-colon. In the present case the reference is 3p7–8; 283–4.

- 2 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Philippe Sellier, fragment 163.
- 3 For the English version, see Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck, 191. The locus is the interpretation of natural law in chap. 26. Hobbes argues that, whatever the truth of the given matter in dispute from a moral or philosophical standpoint, in specifically civil terms the truth of a law case is what the judge says it is in his person as the duly appointed representative of sovereign authority. For “it is by the Sovereign Power that it is Law,” i.e., that it acquires force of law – something mere natural law lacks so long as there is no sovereign to enforce it.
- 4 Louis Marin, “La parole mangée ou le corps divin saisi par les signes,” in *La parole mangée et autres essais théologico-politiques*, 11–35.
- 5 Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *La logique ou l'art de penser*, notes and afterword by Charles Jourdain, 139.
- 6 See Michael Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*. Also the same author's *After Caravaggio*, which adds a richly circumstantial analysis of the *caravaggisti*, all those European painters who followed in the master's titanic wake.
- 7 Pierre Gassendi, 5th objections to René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *Œuvres complètes*, 3 vols., 2.721.
- 8 Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*, chap. 1.
- 9 Spinoza consistently writes of ideas and concepts as existing “in the mind” of God even though he just as consistently insists that God has no intent, will, or consciousness, and so none of the marks of what we normally call “mind.” The point is that, like everything else in the universe, ideas and concepts really exist, like the minds in which they form and without which they would not be known as the intellectual entities they are. As we will recall later, the “intellectual love of God” that is at once the goal and source of true happiness is also that love God comes to feel for himself: through our love of God, of whom we are part, God loves himself. I believe Spinoza speaks of ideas and concepts as being in the mind of God in the same way. By forming adequate ideas and true concepts, we as it were *mind* God, as being that part of God capable of doing so through the activities of our own minds – which are of course, like everything else, properly his even if no individual stands in for God in person. Put slightly differently, and in parallel with what we will say about the “intellectual love of God” later in this chapter, the “knowledge of God” obtained through adequate ideas contains a double genitive: our knowledge of God is God's knowledge both in general and of himself. Henry E. Allison, in

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analytic tradition to this insight in commenting on 2p45, “every idea of each body, or of each singular thing which actually exists, necessarily involves an eternal and infinite essence of God,” 118–19. Deleuze gets closer still, discussing the modifications that enter into our conception of God in the perspective of Spinoza’s “third” type of knowledge. See *Spinoza et le problème de l’expression*, 288–9.

- 10 Louis Althusser, “L’objet du ‘Capital,’” in Louis Althusser et al., *Lire le Capital*, 403.
- 11 Christopher Braider, *Refiguring the Real: Picture and Modernity in Word and Image, 1400–1700*, chap. 5, and *Baroque Self-Invention and Historical Truth: Hercules at the Crossroads*, esp. chap. 3. Also Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne; and José Maravall, *The Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure*, trans. Terry Cochran.
- 12 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 39, esp. 322. For a commentary on the context of Hobbes’s objections to Robert Boyle’s pneumatic experiments, Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*, chap. 3.
- 13 Francis Bacon, “Of Masques and Triumphs,” *The Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral*, in *Francis Bacon: A Selection of His Works*, ed. Sidney Warhaft, 145. On the political-cum-ideological function of royal entertainments, the classic studies are Jean-Marie Apostolides, *Le roi-machine: Spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV*; Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*; Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance*; and Frances A. Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century*.
- 14 On Bernini’s debt to Kircher, Anthony Grafton, “The Ancient City Restored: Archaeology, Ecclesiastical History, and Egyptology,” in *Bring Out Your Dead: The Past as Revelation*, 60–1.
- 15 Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Golden Age*.
- 16 Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*; Richard Helgerson, *Adulterous Alliances: Home, State, and History in Early Modern European Drama and Painting*, chap. 4; Gary Schwartz, *Rembrandt: His Life, His Paintings*, where Rembrandt’s dealings with markets, patrons, and commissions is a pervasive theme; and Svetlana Alpers, *Rembrandt’s Enterprise: The Studio and the Market*, esp. chap. 4.
- 17 Celeste Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion: The Art and Writing of Samuel van Hoogstraten*.
- 18 On a recent visit to the National Gallery, I discovered that the curators have altered the presentation of the box in a way that diminishes the experience of peeking inside. The box is closed on three sides, leaving the fourth as a source of illumination. In the past, the fourth side was screened by a sheet of wax paper that allowed light through without revealing the box’s inner surfaces. Doubtless moved by a laudable desire to let viewers see how Hoogstraten constructed an illusion only properly seen through the two apertures in upper corners of the box, it was decided to replace the paper screen with a pane of plexiglass. I cannot help feeling that the gain in scientific transparency entails a loss in artistic impact, and so in science

too. For the box was specifically designed to conceal secrets that demand active mental as well as physical investigation to be revealed.

- 19 Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, chap. 1, and Alpers, *Rembrandt's Enterprise*, chap. 1, esp. 33, where she introduces the notion of the distinctive "look" Rembrandt achieved in his portraits through the combined inward-looking isolation of his subjects and the distinctive thickness of his application of paint. Also the development of Alpers's idea in Berger, *Fictions of the Pose*, 351–3, who relates the phenomenon to Rembrandt's self-portraiture by invoking his characteristic way of looking at other artists' work.
- 20 Berger, *Fictions of the Pose*, pt. 4, and Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, chap. 2.
- 21 Jacques Lacan, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, lectures 6–9. For Berger's development in his reading of portraits, *Fictions of the Pose*, chaps. 7–9.
- 22 Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, chap. 2. Also Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion*, 182–3.
- 23 Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art History*. Also see the discussion of Poussin in Christopher Braider, *The Matter of Mind: Reason and Experience in the Age of Descartes*, chap. 2.
- 24 David Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*. Also the same author's *The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics*, which relates the idealism of Renaissance art to the idealist invention of the philosophical discipline of aesthetics in eighteenth-century Germany.
- 25 On the imitation of nature, see Roger de Piles, *Abrégé de la vie des peintres*, 17, 21–2, 222. On truth in art, the same author's *Cours de peinture par principes*, 27. For a solid overview, see Thomas Puttfarcken, *Roger de Piles' Theory of Art*. For more subtle glosses of the ideas presented here, Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *La Couleur éloquente: Rhétorique et peinture à l'âge classique*, 183–211; and Braider, *Refiguring the Real*, 156–9 and 249–50, *Baroque Self-Invention and Historical Truth*, 80–4, and *The Matter of Mind*, 154–5 and 163.
- 26 Johannes Kepler, *Ad Vitellionem paralipomena*, as cited in Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, 36. For a recent discussion of Kepler's notion of vision as "painting" or picturing, see A. Mark Smith, *From Sight to Light: The Passage from Ancient to Modern Optics*, 359–60 and 367–8. Smith expressly notes the invertive "turn" involved.
- 27 Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de Hooge Schoole der Schilderkonst, anders de Zichtbaere Welt*, 33.
- 28 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Ernest C. Mossner, 255.
- 29 Gilles Deleuze, *Le Pli: Leibniz et le baroque*.
- 30 For the "aesthetic of the good physician" and the contrast between "rhetorical" and "dialectical" engagement with readers, Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts*:

- The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature*, chap. 1. Fish's analysis of readerly experience leads directly to the strong reader-response arguments advanced in his later *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*.
- 31 On indiscernibles, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Discours de métaphysique* (1686), in *Discours de métaphysique, suivi de Monadologie*, ed. Laurence Bouquiaux, section 9.
  - 32 Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art*, 1–2.
  - 33 Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, chap. 6.
  - 34 Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, intro.
  - 35 Joseph Margolis, *Interpretation Radical but Not Unruly: The New Puzzle of the Arts and History*, chap. 1, and on Danto, 145–6, 257–8, and 287.
  - 36 Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 155. Also Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion*, 112.
  - 37 Yirmiyahu Yovel, *The Marrano of Reason*, esp. chap. 4.
  - 38 On Spinoza's circle of friends and intellectual associates, Nadler, *Spinoza*, esp. chap. 7, which covers Spinoza's movements following the *cherem*, and Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750*, chap. 8.
  - 39 On Spinoza's correspondence with Oldenburg and, through Oldenburg, with Boyle, Nadler, *Spinoza*, esp. 291–300 and 329–33. For the correspondence itself, see Spinoza, *Complete Works*, passim. On Spinoza's lens-grinding, Nadler, *Spinoza*, 182–4. It is frustrating that no systematic record of Spinoza's clientele seems to have survived.
  - 40 Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Philosophie pratique*, 42–3.
  - 41 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness, 73–4.
  - 42 Bryan Jay Wolf, *Vermeer and the Invention of Seeing*, esp. chaps. 1–2.
  - 43 For an introductory overview, Angela Vanhaelen, *The Wake of Iconoclasm: Painting and the Church in the Dutch Republic*.
  - 44 Edward Snow, *A Study of Vermeer*, 2nd ed., 87–8, and n. 13 (193), and Berger, 155–69. Also see Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, which is in many ways a book-length meditation on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's posthumous *Le visible et l'invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, and related passages in his earlier *La Phénoménologie de la perception*. Didi-Huberman's punning title says it all: what we see looks at us, particularly in view of the idiomatic force of the verb *regarder* in French. *Ça te regarde* is the equivalent of something like “it ought to matter to you” or “you ought to pay attention,” and *ça ne te regarde pas* means “it's none of your business.”
  - 45 This refutes an idea that both Alpers and Brusati advance: that Dutch investment in visual technology went hand in hand with a disembodied picture of mind, and

- so vision. See Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, 27–33, and Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion*, 170–82.
- 46 Snow, *A Study of Vermeer*, 3–22. A good example of the failure and perhaps even refusal to feel is provided by the account of *Young Woman with a Pearl Earring* (called here, as in Snow, *Head of a Girl*) in Lawrence Gowing, *Vermeer*, 137–9, which is all about Vermeer's supposed oyster-like power to shield himself from disturbing intrusions by enveloping them in pearly beauty.
- 47 Charles Le Brun, *L'Expression des passions et autres conférences*, ed. Julien Philippe. Also see Bryson, *Word and Image*, chap. 2, for a discussion of the legibility of the body in Le Brun's theory. As Bryson notes, Le Brun aims to teach painters not only how to express the emotions but also, and above all, how to disambiguate that expression, avoiding the kind of doubt Vermeer exploits to such moving effect.
- 48 Helgerson, *Adulterous Alliances*, 116–19, and Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion*, 83–6.
- 49 Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion*, 85.
- 50 With St Paul's contrast of visible and invisible things in mind, it is tantalizing to note that, as both Brusati and Thijs Weststeijn report, Hoogstraten wrote a companion for the *Inleyding* on the "invisible world." The second treatise was never published, and seems to have disappeared. Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion*, 139 and n. 175 (300); Weststeijn, *The Visible World: Samuel van Hoogstraten's Legitimation of Painting in the Dutch Golden Age*, trans. Beverley Jackson and Lynne Richards, 38–41.
- 51 Hoogstraten, *Inleyding*, 33–4.
- 52 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 141–50. For a concise reminder of imagination's early modern (and so pre-Romantic) status, John D. Lyons, *Before Imagination: Embodied Thought from Montaigne to Rousseau*, intro.
- 53 On reflection as the fulcrum on which Spinoza's system turns in order to rescue human reason from enslavement to both internal and external determinism, Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, xxii–iv.
- 54 For his analysis of the mouth-watering experience of looking at Dutch food pieces, see Harry Berger, Jr, *Caterpillars: Reflections on Seventeenth-Century Dutch Still Life Painting*, 26–7.
- 55 Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine*, 9–10.
- 56 Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion*, 91–109.
- 57 For the classic overview, see Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat*, chaps. 1–2 on early modern perspective and chap. 4 on optical machines, including *camerae obscurae* and perspective boxes. On Hoogstraten, 204–6.
- 58 Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion*, 213–17; Weststeijn, *The Visible World*, 91–5.
- 59 Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion*, 177.

- 60 For Walpole's judgment, Matthew C. Hunter, *Wicked Intelligence: Visual Art and the Science of Experiment in Restoration London*, 10. For Hunter's definition of "wicked intelligence" more generally, 22–3.
- 61 For assessments of Hooke's character and social background, Steven Shapin, "Who was Robert Hooke?," in *Robert Hooke: New Studies*, ed. Michael Hunter and Simon Schaffer, 255–85; and Stephen Pumfrey, "Ideas above His Station: A Social Study of Hooke's Curatorship of Experiments," 1–44.
- 62 For Hooke's abuse of Leibniz's calculating machine, Hunter, *Wicked Intelligence*, 173–4.
- 63 For the German visitor, see Hunter, *Wicked Intelligence*, 168–9. On the entirely different ethos governing the comparable repository of curiosities under Kircher's care in the Vatican, see Eugenio Lo Sardo, "Kircher's Rome," in *Athanasius Kircher: The Last Man Who Knew Everything*, ed. Paula Findlen, 60–2; and Joscelyn Godwin, *Athanasius Kircher's Theatre of the World: The Life and Work of the Last Man to Search for Universal Knowledge*, 45–6 and 174. For two important if over-heated discussions of experimentalism's desecratory character especially where the human body is concerned, Barbara Maria Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imagining the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine*; and Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*.
- 64 Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*.

### 3 Persons and Portraits: The Vicissitudes of Burckhardt's Individual

- 1 Molière, *Œuvres complètes*, 2.883.
- 2 Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *La logique ou l'art de penser*, notes and afterword by Charles Jourdain, 147. On the words of consecration in the Mass, 139–40.
- 3 For an invaluable survey of such matters, see Frank Lestringant, *Une sainte horreur, ou le voyage en Eucharistie, XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. For grammatical issues of the sort Arnauld and Nicole grapple with, 1–25 and 270–82.
- 4 Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes: Essai d'anthropologie symétrique*, chaps. 1–2.
- 5 C.S. Peirce, "Issues in Pragmaticism," in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2 (1893–1913), 349. Also the wonderful use to which the formula is put in Erwin Panofsky, "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, 14.
- 6 See Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?," 225–48. Though it provides a remarkably precise and compact critique of the reductiveness we associate with critical science studies of the sort the author himself has championed, Latour's palinode makes for curious reading – and not least because, in his eagerness to be at the head of every parade, he insists he has nothing to retract. For a more irenic



- survey of the same problem, see Lorraine Daston, “Science Studies and the History of Science,” 798–813.
- 7 C.S. Peirce, “Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs,” in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler, 98–119.
  - 8 Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy: An Essay*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore.
  - 9 This is a founding theme of, e.g., John Pope-Hennessy’s classic *The Portrait in the Renaissance*, esp. chap. 1, on “the cult of personality.” The notion is still current in an art-history textbook like Shearer West, *Portraiture*.
  - 10 Roger de Piles, *Abrégé de la vie des peintres*, 222.
  - 11 Piles, *Abrégé*, 433–5.
  - 12 André Félibien, unpaginated preface to *Conférences de l’Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, pendant l’année 1667*.
  - 13 Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*. Also Apostolidès, *Le roi-machine*; and Louis Marin, *Le portrait du roi*.
  - 14 For an excellent commentary on both the painting and the tangled circumstances surrounding the composition of the explanatory inscription, see Hall Børnstad, “Plus d’éclaircissements touchant la Grande Galerie de Versailles’: Du nouveau sur les inscriptions latines,” 321–43. Also see the same author’s “‘Vous m’avez fait voir des choses que j’ai ressenties’: Le Roi, son peintre et la question des émotions publiques,” 43–56.
  - 15 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 226–7.
  - 16 Burckhardt, *Civilization*, 216.
  - 17 For a wonderful account of Burckhardt’s social background and perceptions, see Lionel Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt: A Study of Unseasonable Ideas*.
  - 18 For the impact of unscrupulous political striving on public and private morality, see Burckhardt, *Civilization*, 262–79.
  - 19 On Nietzsche’s relations with and debts to Burckhardt, see Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt*, 414–15.
  - 20 Burckhardt, *Civilization*, 293–6.
  - 21 Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, chap. 6.
  - 22 Burckhardt is to this extent close to the Matthew Arnold of not only *Culture and Anarchy* but “Dover Beach,” and the one because the other. Burckhardt’s, Arnold’s, and indeed Nietzsche’s resort to a kind of esoteric inner exile as self-conscious members of a tiny elite of cultivated individuals also speaks to the discussion of Erich Auerbach’s at once political and intellectual picture of literary humanism inaugurated by Edward W. Said’s memorable introduction to the fiftieth-anniversary edition of *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. In a

- beautiful essay on Auerbach's readings of Pascal's political vision, Jane O. Newman suggests how this posture antedates Auerbach's exile in Istanbul in 1933. See "Force and Justice: Auerbach's Pascal," in *Political Theology and Early Modernity*, ed. Graham Hammill and Julia Reinhard Lupton, 159–80.
- 23 Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*.
  - 24 W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, chap. 2.
  - 25 This underscores the point Marin misses in his haste to fuse king and portrait in *Le portrait du roi*, 16–18. For commentary, see Christopher Braider, *The Matter of Mind: Reason and Experience in the Age of Descartes*, 165–7.
  - 26 Berger, *Fictions of the Pose*, chap. 1.
  - 27 For a helpful historical analysis of the problem of portraiture in the Middle Ages, see Stephen Perkinson, *The Likeness of the King: A Prehistory of Portraiture in Late Medieval France*. Perkinson is especially interested in shifts in the "discourse" of likeness in the later Middle Ages, where to start with the term means something closer to what we would now distinguish as "lifelikeness" than likeness proper. Thus where the circumstantial details in a fourteenth-century portrait of the French king John II encourage modern viewers to see a likeness of John himself, those same details led medievals to speak of "likeness" on the grounds that they make the person in the picture look like a real man, without necessarily worrying about whether this real-looking man looked specifically like John.
  - 28 Giorgio Vasari claimed that Jan van Eyck was the inventor of oil painting. See the long theoretical introduction to the *Lives of the Painters* (1550) in *Vasari on Technique*, trans. Louisa S. Macle hose, ed. G. Baldwin Brown, 226–30. While not challenging oil painting's Netherlandish origins, art historians have withdrawn the specific attribution. See Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 2 vols., 1.151–3; and Otto Pächt, *The Practice of Art History: Reflections on Method*, trans. Christopher S. Wood, 11.
  - 29 The problem springs from what Berger, *Fictions of the Pose*, 107–17, calls the "physiognomic fallacy," the presumption that the face accurately represents the soul. Also Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture*, chap. 1, demystifying the "authority of the likeness." By contrast, Cynthia Freeland, *Portraits and Persons: A Philosophical Inquiry*, chap. 5, tries to put the fallacy on a scientific basis by invoking, among other things, Darwin's evolutionary account of facial expression. Note that Freeland cites neither Berger nor Brilliant.
  - 30 Svetlana Alpers, *Rembrandt's Enterprise: The Studio and the Market*, 83.
  - 31 Rembrandt's habit of turning sitters into "Rembrandts" inspires Alpers's entertaining fancy of the portrait of Jan Six as depicting the poser's effort to escape the artist's studio, *Rembrandt's Enterprise*, 93.
  - 32 Berger, *Fictions of the Pose*, chaps. 8–9.

- 33 Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, 2nd ed., 1–14. Also Alpers's discussion of Rembrandt's exploitation of the resources of the marketplace in *Rembrandt's Enterprise*, chap. 4.
- 34 Jonathan Brown, *Velázquez: Painter and Courtier*, 47.
- 35 Abby E. Zanger, *Scenes from the Marriage of Louis XIV: Nuptial Fictions and the Making of Absolutist Power*, 32, and Louis Marin, "Le corps du roi," in *La parole mangée et autres essais théologico-politiques*, 212–13.
- 36 Rembrandt's mockery of Italian Renaissance portraits is Berger's core theme, most powerfully expressed in the way he turns Alpers's notion of "the Rembrandt look" into an index of how Rembrandt's pictures look at Italian art. See *Fictions of the Pose*, 10–11.
- 37 This is the view of the curators at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, where the picture hangs: [www.mfa.org/collections/object/the-white-hat-34218](http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/the-white-hat-34218).
- 38 Close attention to models is an entailment of Berger's thesis of "the Rembrandt look." But see too Brilliant, *Portraiture*, chap. 2, on "fashioning the self."
- 39 Jean de La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes*, ed. Pierre Kuentz, 75.
- 40 Jacques Lacan, "Le stade du miroir," in *Écrits I*, 94. Also Berger's canny deformation, "the armor of an alienating representation," *Fictions of the Pose*, 172.
- 41 Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 33–35, and *Opere di Baldassare Castiglione, Giovanni della Casa, Benvenuto Cellini*, 8–12. References appear in the text as page numbers for the translation and the original in that order.
- 42 See Castiglione: *The Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Robert W. Hanning and David Rosand, esp. Eduardo Saccone, "Grazia, Sprezzatura, Affettazione in the Courtier," 45–67, and David Rosand, "The Portrait, the Courtier, and Death," 91–129. Also see Carla Freccero, "Politics and Aesthetics in Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*: Book III and the Discourse of Women," in *Creative Imitation: New Essays on Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene*, ed. David Quint, Margaret Ferguson, G.W. Pigman III, and Wayne A. Rebhorn, 259–79.
- 43 Harry Berger, Jr., *The Absence of Grace: Sprezzatura and Suspicion in Two Renaissance Courtesy Books*.
- 44 Though his title clearly hints at it, Berger does not rise to the theological challenge.
- 45 Castiglione's speakers constantly grind to a halt, claiming they have now said all they had to say, only to be urged on by their listeners. See, e.g., *The Book of the Courtier* (74–5; 55–6), where Ludovico hesitates to perform what the Magnifico Giuliano calls his "duty" to "teach the courtier not only how to speak but also to write" on the grounds that he has already said all he knows. Though such hesitations are modesty tropes, and so examples of courtly *sprezzatura*, their invariable effect is to prompt demands for more.

- 46 Good on this are Thomas M. Greene, “*Il Cortegiano* and the Choice of a Game,” in Hanning and Rosand (eds.), *Castiglione*, 1–15; and Daniel Javitch, “*Il Cortegiano* and the Constraints of Despotism,” *ibid.*, 17–28.
- 47 See esp. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* (35–6; 12), for the narrator’s confession that no living man could ever live up to the specifically Platonic ideal the dialogues portray. This too is surely a modesty trope. However, it also yields an anticipation of what will become the statistical law of errors. For if courtiers like those Castiglione hopes to inspire “cannot achieve the perfection, such as it is, that I have endeavoured to convey, the one who comes nearest to it will be the most perfect, in the same way as when a number of archers shoot at a target, though no one hits the bull’s eye, the one who gets closest is certainly better than the rest.” Bound as he remains to the primacy of the ideal, and so to the model of absolute epistemic certainty I describe in [chapter 1](#), Castiglione cannot draw the statistical lesson his analogy teaches. For unlike the bull’s eye, which is an observable given that enables us to measure directly how close the arrows come, the ideal is as such an unknown. Still, by plotting where arrows fall and the clusters they form, we can produce at least moral certainty as to the bull’s eye’s whereabouts. See Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*, 177–84, which includes a discussion of Pierre-Simon Laplace’s contribution to “the doctrine of chances” as developed by American pragmatists.
- 48 Berger, *Fictions of the Pose*, 107–17.
- 49 Marin, *Le portrait du roi*, 16–18.
- 50 On dissimulation both at court and elsewhere, see Perez Zagorin, *Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution and Conformity in Early Modern Europe*; and Jon R. Snyder, *Dissimulation and the Culture of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe*. Also see Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, part 4 and the 1968 postscript, where the author develops the picture of the secretive figure he calls *homo clausus*.
- 51 On *virtù*, see Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, new ed., trans. George Bull, 12, where the Italian term is translated by “prowess” in a paragraph that closes by invoking the moral equivalence of good and evil from the standpoint of Time, standing in for Fortune. For Cesare Borgia, chaps. 7 and 17. Note moreover the specific mention of Cesare’s unparalleled “powers of dissimulation” (25).
- 52 Lauro Martines, *April Blood: Florence and the Plot against the Medics*.
- 53 For Zuccolo, Marcel Gauchet, “L’État au miroir de la raison d’État: La France et la chrétienté,” in *Théoriciens et théories de la raison d’État aux XVI<sup>e</sup> et au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, ed. Yves-Charles Zarka, 193–244. On his claim to borrow “reason of state” from conversations in streets and workplaces, 193. Though he confines examples of the phenomenon to courts, Botero too underscores how widespread use of the term

was by the time he came to write about it. See *Reason of State*, ed. and trans. Robert Birely, 1.

- 54 On the tag's attribution to Louis XI, see Adrianna E. Bakos, "'Qui nescit dissimulare, nescit regnare': Louis XI and *Raison d'état* during the Reign of Louis XIII," 399–416, esp. 400–1 and 408.
- 55 Berger, *Fictions of the Pose*, chap. 6.
- 56 For Rembrandt's mockingly revisionary use of Titian's *Portrait of a Man with a Blue Sleeve*, Berger, *Fictions of the Pose*, 464–73. Berger also has interesting things to say here about Rembrandt's re-vision of Raphael's *Portrait of Castiglione*.
- 57 Typical is Walter Liedtke, "Frans Hals: Style and Substance," 4–48. Having placed Hals in the community he painted for and described his *modus operandi* and the conventions of portraiture in his time, the author proceeds to the main event, i.e., the substance of his portraits, and in particular "his gift for analyzing – or, at least, projecting – individual character" (33).
- 58 Molière, *Le Misanthrope* 2.4.585–94, *Œuvres complètes* 1.675, and *The Misanthrope and Tartuffe*, trans. Richard Wilbur, 61–2.

#### 4 Justice in the Marketplace: The Invisible Hand in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fayre*

- 1 For a quick overview of the genre, Julie Sanders, *The Cambridge Introduction to Early Modern Drama, 1576–1642*, chap. 5.
- 2 Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England*, esp. chap. 2.
- 3 Ben Jonson, *Every Man out of His Humour*, ed. W. Bang and W.W. Greg, induction, ll. 233–8.
- 4 I use the text of *Bartholomew Fayre* in Ben Jonson, *Five Plays*, ed. G.A. Wilkes, hereafter cited by line numbers for the induction and by act, scene, and line numbers for the main body of the play.
- 5 The key source here is Carl Schmitt, *Political Theory: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Also Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*; and Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, and *State of Exception*.
- 6 This is already obvious in Benjamin, who focuses exclusively on the German baroque *Trauerspiel*. But it also emerges in Schmitt's *Hamlet or Hecuba: The Intrusion of Time into the Play*, and in the attention both this text and Schmitt's writings on Hobbes receive from Victoria Kahn, most recently in *The Future of Illusion: Political Theory and Early Modern Texts*. Also Kenneth Reinhard and Julia Reinhard Lupton, *After Oedipus: Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis*, originally

published by Cornell University Press in 1993, reissued with a new preface and an epilogue on Lacan and the Ten Commandments, which uses Benjamin's theory of baroque mourning as a way into Freud's theory of that emotion to which Shakespearean tragedy is then subjected, followed more recently by Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology*, and *Political Theology and Early Modernity*, ed. Hammil and Lupton.

- 7 Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5.
- 8 Ibid., 48–52.
- 9 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 2nd ed. As we note in the next chapter, Kantorowicz writes implicitly yet specifically against his Schmittian model despite incorporating Schmitt's concept in his book's subtitle. He does so by emphasizing the "fictive" character of the transformation lawyers imposed on theological concepts as an expression of self-determining human creativity. See, e.g., Lorna Hutson, "Imagining Justice: Kantorowicz and Shakespeare," 118–42; and Kahn, *The Future of Illusion*, chap. 2.
- 10 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*.
- 11 Benjamin, *Origin*, 71.
- 12 The addition to the Absolute is perhaps most obvious in Agamben but, to my mind, it infects pretty much the entire tradition of commentary on Benjamin and Schmitt alike. See, e.g., Jacques Derrida, *Force de loi*, 2nd ed., where the true force that enable's law's enforcement turns out to be rooted in law's metaphysical rootlessness.
- 13 The thesis gets its name in Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, 270. It is telling that Weber's notion receives bracingly rough treatment at the hands of yet another member of Schmitt's conflicted generation in Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, chap. 2, on "natural right and the distinction between facts and values."
- 14 Benjamin, *Origin*, 119.
- 15 For complementary disquiet, see Blair Hoxby, "The Function of Allegory in Baroque Tragic Drama: What Benjamin Got Wrong," in *Thinking Allegory Otherwise*, ed. Brenda Machosky, 87–116.
- 16 There is a telltale crossover here with the Foucauldian critique of the "liberal subject" to which we turn later. Though Foucault and his followers have shown little if any interest in Schmitt per se, the underlying distaste – shared, not at all coincidentally, with Weber – for markets and the soulless yet world-conquering capitalistic rationality they at once harness, spring from, and spread to all corners of the globe is the same.
- 17 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, esp. pt. 2 for his analysis of the term "bare life."
- 18 On the curious vagueness at the heart of Weber's talk about lost "values," Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 39: "Weber never explained what he understood by 'values.'" Meanwhile, the longed-for (and impossible) Messianic release is a leitmotiv



in all of Benjamin's work, but see in particular the early "Critique of Violence," in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1 (1913–26), 236–52, and the late exercise in "materialist theology," "On the Concept of History," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4 (1938–40), 389–400.

- 19 Kantorowicz himself is quite explicit on this point, notably in the section entitled "Christus-Fiscus," *The King's Two Bodies*, 164–92. Also see the strong commentary in Hutson, "Imagining Justice," and Richard Halpern, "The King's Two Buckets: Kantorowicz, *Richard II*, and Fiscal *Trauerspiel*," 67–76.
- 20 Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 7–23, where the question of royal property is used to define "the problem" addressed in the book as a whole.
- 21 Given the role that Shakespeare's *King Richard II* (1595) plays in introducing Kantorowicz's argument and, as a direct consequence, in setting the terms for English-language discussions of his book, it is wonderful to discover that one of the clearest (as well as most beautiful) images representing the concept of the King in Parliament takes the form of an illuminated initial in a manuscript compilation of historical documents now in the British Library. The collection supplies a chronicle of English kings, together with rules for activities at the royal court, and was published in 1390, during Richard's reign. A note accompanying the online reproduction reminds us that the quarrel between Thomas de Mowbray and Henry of Bolinbroke, whose failed adjudication opens Shakespeare's play, was initiated in Parliament. <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/illmanus/cottmanucoll/t/011cotnerd00006u00072000.html>.
- 22 Such is the thrust of Kantorowicz's analysis of Shakespeare's *Richard II* in *The King's Two Bodies*, chap. 2.
- 23 This explains why, the reign of Elizabeth apart owing to the special problem of legitimacy posed by the queen's unmarried state and her sex, there is little in English experience to compare with the industrial-scale manufacture of royal imagery so conspicuous during the apogee of absolutist France. See, e.g., Jean-Marie Apostolides, *Le-roi machine: spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV*; Louis Marin, *Le portrait du roi*; and Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*.
- 24 Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 49–50. Also Apostolides, *Le prince sacrifié: théâtre et politique au temps de Louis XIV*.
- 25 Timothy Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy*, chaps. 1–2.
- 26 My debt here to Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky, is obvious.
- 27 On English dramatic paratexts generally, Brian W. Schneider, *The Framing Text of Early Modern English Drama: "Whining" Prologues and "Armed" Epilogues*.
- 28 I cannot forebear mentioning the unwitting echoes of Busy's Messianic fulminations in Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: La fondation de l'universalisme*; and Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on Letter to the Romans*. In the EBSCO Publishing : eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 3/5/2023 9:39 PM via RUSSIAN STATE LIBRARY  
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- wake of the collapse of the Soviet Empire, the turn to the universalizing claims Paul grounded in the supposed imminence of the apocalyptic end times is telling (and comical).
- 29 The “panoptical” fantasy to which Michel Foucault’s *Surveiller et punir* has given such wide currency long antedated Foucault’s archetypal Jeremy Bentham. The legendary doings of Francis Walsingham and John Thurloe in England, or of Cardinal Richelieu in France, show otherwise.
  - 30 I rely here on the accounts of Jonson’s upbringing and education in David Riggs, *Ben Jonson: A Life*, chap. 1, and Ian Donaldson, *Ben Jonson: A Life*, chap. 4.
  - 31 Ben Jonson, “An Expostulation with Inigo Jones,” in *The Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt, 345–7. For the Howell quote, Donaldson, *Ben Jonson*, 423.
  - 32 This is an obligatory theme of Jonson’s masques, but it receives perhaps its most interesting (if Tacitean, and so paradoxical) expression in his *Sejanus* of 1603, where we are shown both how royal corruption in the person of the emperor Tiberius makes the title character’s upstart ambitions possible and how the sheer weight of the state crushes the interloper in the end, if only by turning him into the tool of even worse figures like Nero and Nero’s mother Agrippina.
  - 33 We are still indebted on this theme to Harry Levin, *The Overreacher: A Study of Christopher Marlowe*.
  - 34 Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, ed. Philip Harth, 74.
  - 35 On the “preposterous” in Bartholomew Fayre, see Luke Wilson, *Theaters of Intention: Drama and the Law in Early Modern England*, chap. 2, esp. 111–13. For Shakespearean parallels, see Joel Altman, “‘Preposterous Conclusions’: Eros, *Enargeia*, and the Composition of *Othello*,” 129–57; and Patricia Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins: Language, Culture, Context*, chap. 1.
  - 36 Wilson, *Theaters of Intention*, 76–83. Also see Victoria Kahn, *Wayward Contracts: The Crisis of Political Obligation in England, 1640–1674*, 46–7. On “Slade’s Case” in the history of English contract law, see Alfred William Brian Simpson, “The Place of Slade’s Case in the History of Contract,” 381–98, and *A History of the Common Law of Contract*, vol. 1, 295–315. For deeper discussion of Slade’s Case, J.H. Baker, “New Light on Slade’s Case I,” 51–67, supplementing Edward Coke’s contemporary report of the case with other material, including Francis Bacon’s arguments in Morley’s defense, and “New Light On Slade’s Case II,” 213–36, reassessing the case in detail.
  - 37 Wilson, *Theaters of Intention*, 81.
  - 38 Beyond the evidence of his infuriated shock at Inigo Jones’s elevation at what he thought to be his expense, many of the 133 surviving dedications Jonson wrote take the form of satirical apostrophes to the kind of readers he abhorred yet could not escape.

- 39 Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, bk. 4, chap. 2. I cite the Simon and Brown point-of-purchase ed. (2012), 260.
- 40 Michel Foucault, *La naissance de la biopolitique: Cours au Collège de France, 1978–1979*, 3–28.
- 41 Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, bk. 5, chap. 1, where he discusses among other things the need for state administration of justice, how justice is best administered, and how it is to be paid for. It is here too that he reminds us that it is also the state's responsibility to see to the nation's infrastructure and to the education of the young. All of these matters, to which Smith devotes hundreds of densely packed pages, are generally overlooked when he is cited for his defense of free markets.
- 42 On "thorough," see Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Archbishop Laud*, 131–4. On Laud's doomed struggle for reform, chap. 6.
- 43 For the early modern underpinnings, see Foucault, *Naissance*, esp. 53–75. The result is the creation of *homo œconomicus*, analysed at length, with special reference to the "neo-liberal" present, in the four lectures delivered from 14 March to 4 April 1979. For the broader social backstory, see the discussion of "discipline" in *Surveiller et punir*, 137–229. On Foucault's fascination with the notion of the price or cost especially of such goods as he concedes that modern political economy has delivered, see Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Foucault beyond Foucault: Power and Its Intensifications since 1984*, 17–23.
- 44 For a helpful commentarial overview, see Nealon, *Foucault beyond Foucault*, chaps. 2–3. But see too the historically rich and unfailingly supple and judicious account in Kahn, *Wayward Contracts*. Kahn's book is among other things a strong corrective to current post-Foucauldian consensus. However, concerned with developments precipitated by the legitimacy crises of the English Civil War, interregnum period, and the Restoration Settlement, her focus is chiefly political and, to this extent, understates the deeper social and economic shifts involved.
- 45 Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution*.
- 46 Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien 1. Arts de faire*, 2nd ed.
- 47 The powerfully emancipatory relationship between interpretation and equity is a presiding theme of Kahn's *Wayward Contracts*. For an especially cogent analysis in the context of drama in which Kahn addresses the phenomenon's specifically "political theological" ramifications, see chap. 10, "Critique," on Milton's *Samson Agonistes*.
- 48 On *Richard II*'s entanglement in the events surrounding the Essex revolt, see the never-bettered account in Evelyn May Albright, "Shakespeare's *Richard II* and the Essex Conspiracy," 686–720.
- 49 See Marcel Gauchet, "L'État au miroir de la raison d'État: La France et la chrétienté," 193.

- 50 Pierre Corneille, letter of dedication to Cardinal Richelieu, *Horace* (1641), in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, 833–5. For commentary, see Christopher Braider *Indiscernible Counterparts: The Invention of the Text in French Classical Drama*, 114–20. On the role social identities played in the literary controversies in which Corneille was embroiled, see Christian Jouhaud, “Power and Literature: The Terms of an Exchange 1624–42,” 34–82; and Hélène Merlin, *Public et littérature en France au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, chaps. 5–6.
- 51 Timothy Murray, *Theatrical Legitimation: Allegories of Genius in Seventeenth-Century England and France*.
- 52 On Jonson’s literary finances, Joseph Loewenstein, *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship*, esp. chap. 2. On his claims to authorship, see Paul D. Cannon, “Ben Jonson, Authorship, and the Rhetoric of English Dramatic Prefatory Criticism,” 178–201. On authorship and money more generally, see Loewenstein’s *The Author’s Due: Printing and the Prehistory of Copyright*; Alain Viala, *Naissance de l’écrivain*, chap. 3; and Julie Stone Peters, *Theatre of the Book 1480–1880: Print, Text, and Performance in Europe*, chaps. 10–12.
- 53 Vincent Descombes, *Le complément de sujet: Enquête sur le fait d’agir de soi-même*.

## 5 Actor, Act, and Action: The Poetics of Agency in Corneille, Racine, and Molière

- 1 See above, chap. 1.
- 2 Apostolidès, *Le prince sacrifié: théâtre et politique au temps de Louis XIV*, chap. 1.
- 3 I allude here to Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Symbolic Act*, chap. 1. We will draw on Jameson’s theory more circumstantially in [chapter 6](#).
- 4 Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, and *Origin of German Tragic Drama*. For simplicity’s sake, I cite only the translation. But note the two long-recognized problems with Osborne’s title. Though “origin” is the normal English equivalent of the German *Ursprung*, Benjamin leans heavily on its literal sense of “upspring” so as to stress the suddenness with which (in this case) *Trauerspiel* springs into existence, and drops out of it again. His account thus sharply counters the sense of evolutionary duration and survival that “origin” implies. Meanwhile, as we will see more particularly later, *Trauerspiel* is also best understood (if not best translated) in literal terms, as Sorrow Play rather than tragedy, or even Osborne’s carefully guarded “tragic drama.”
- 5 Benjamin, *Origin*, 138–42. Benjamin’s tacit medievalism has a great deal in common with that observed widely among Weimar intellectuals, especially among those affiliated with the circle around the poet Stefan George. Erich Auerbach’s lifelong devotion to Dante, Ernst Kantorowicz’s early biography of the Hohenstaufen Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II and later explorations of medieval legal thought, and Carl Schmitt’s defense of the political-theological achievements of

both the medieval Church and the medieval social order of caste-based representations all speak to the phenomenon.

- 6 Ibid., 124–5.
- 7 Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, bk. 2, chap. 26.
- 8 Some readers will spot the parallel with the emphasis on private initiative both within and against the structures imposed by the pre-established social order defended in the intro. to Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien 1. Arts de faire*, 2nd ed., already discussed in [chapter 4](#). Like Certeau, I defend the ordinary “man in the street” of daily life against the reductions to which so much current historical and social theory subjects him. People are indeed confronted with a world whose underlying rules and structures constrain not only their range of action but their self-understanding. Nevertheless, attention to the *bricolage* they bring to the business of everyday life reveals a degree of free creativity that deserves celebration as well as analysis. It is a pity that, despite Certeau’s invocation of Wittgenstein’s example (23–7) in trying to avoid the clamorous “nonsense” of theory talk by attending closely to the twists and turns of ordinary language, the need to be taken seriously by brother and sister theorists seems to have overruled this laudable aim. But he does at least make the point, however hard he found it to live up to the related standard.
- 9 I am reminded of the chilling anecdote, taken from the journal of the friar Olivier Lefèbre d’Ormesson (1668), with which Jean-Marie Apostolides opens *Le roi-machine: spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV*: “Une femme qui avait perdu son fils d’une chute pendant qu’il travaillait aux machines de Versailles, et qui avait été taxée à la Chambre de Justice, outrée de douleur, présenta un placet en blanc pour être remarquée; et, en effet, on lui demanda en riant ce qu’elle prétendait; en même temps, elle dit des injures au Roi, l’appelant putassier, *roi machiniste*, tyran, et mille autres sottises et extravagances, dont le Roi surpris demanda si elle parlait de lui. A quoi elle répliqua que oui et continua. Elle fut prise et condamnée sur-le-champ à avoir le fouet et menée aux Petites-Maisons. Le fouet lui fut donné par le bourg de Saint-Germain avec une rigueur extrême, et cette femme ne dit jamais mot, souffrant ce mal comme un martyr et pour l’amour de Dieu” (10).
- 10 Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Citizen-Saints*.
- 11 On tyrants and martyrs, Benjamin, *Origin*, 69–74; on the intriguer, 95–100.
- 12 Daniel Casper von Lohenstein, *Sophonisbe*, ed. Rolf Tarot, 38–40.
- 13 Benjamin, *Origin*, 177–85.
- 14 The following section was inspired by participation in a seminar on “Benjamin’s Hypothetical French *Trauerspiel*” conducted at the annual meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association in New Orleans in April 2010. A first version appears in *Walter Benjamin’s Hypothetical French Trauerspiel*, ed. Katherine Ibbett and Hall Bjørnstad, 94–107.

- 15 *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, 315.
- 16 See Christopher Braider, “Talking Like a Book: Exception and the State of Nature in Benjamin and Molière,” 382–406.
- 17 Jean Rousset, *La Littérature de l'âge baroque en France: Circé et le Paon*.
- 18 For a more detailed discussion of how to use the term baroque, see Christopher Braider, *Baroque Self-Invention and Historical Truth: Hercules at the Crossroads*, intro.
- 19 Benjamin, *Origin*, 88.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 49, 81–4, 127–8, 132–3.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 135–8; on *Trauerspiel*'s deficiencies, 123–5, 173, 200.
- 22 Jane O. Newman, *Benjamin's Library: Modernity, Nation, and the Baroque*. The links between the interpretation of the baroque and German nationalism from 1871 to National Socialism are her presiding theme. See esp. chap. 1 and, on the special relevance of the Great War, the discussion of “Lutheran war theology,” 143–69.
- 23 René Wellek, “The Concept of the Baroque,” 77.
- 24 E.g., Jean-Claude Vuillemin, *Baroquisme et théâtralité: Le théâtre de Jean-Rotrou*.
- 25 Notably Gustave Lanson, *Histoire de la littérature française*, a book deeply indebted to the theory of French historico-cultural singularity in Hippolyte Taine's *Origines de la France contemporaine* (1876–94). The strategically central fourth part of Lanson's *Histoire* turns on the creation of the first true French “chefs-d'œuvre” in the seventeenth century. In Corneille, Lanson summarizes the poet's impact on subsequent French literature thus: “Before him, classical tragedy did not exist. Through him, it existed. He it is who wholly detached it from poetic and pathetic Greek tragedy, who turned it into a distinct and opposite species” (187). This same presumption underlies René Bray's still weighty *La formation de la doctrine classique en France*.
- 26 To see how deep-seated the traditional French picture of the *grand siècle*'s pan-European authority is, see Jane K. Brown, *The Persistence of Allegory: Drama and Neoclassicism from Shakespeare to Wagner*.
- 27 On Corneille's debts to the Society of Jesus, Marc Fumaroli, *Héros et orateurs: Rhétorique et dramaturgie cornéliennes*, esp. pt. 2, chap. 6.
- 28 Pierre Corneille, *Discours de la tragédie*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Georges Couton, 3.168–70. References to Corneille's plays are to this edition.
- 29 Jean de La Bruyère, *Les Caractères, ou les mœurs de ce siècle*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Julien Benda, 84.
- 30 Like Benjamin, Goldmann consistently pursues textual analysis projected against the background of a metaphysical absolute relative to which all insights prove inadequate historical approximations whose Kantian origin surfaces expressly in his discussion of Pascal's wager. See *Le Dieu caché: Étude sur la vision tragique dans les Pensées de Pascal et dans le théâtre de Racine*, chap. 15.



- 31 We owe this insight to Fumaroli, *Héros et orateurs*, 41. Also see Jean-Marie Apostolides, *Le prince sacrifié: théâtre et politique au temps de Louis XIV*, 53–8, proposing Alidor as a prototype for the tragic heroes to come.
- 32 Corneille, *La Place Royale*, 5.7.1506–9. This apparent revival of love may merely test Angélique's feelings to ensure that she really does not love him anymore – assuming it is not an ironic exercise of the actor's gift of heartless detachment from the emotions he creates in others.
- 33 Corneille, *La Place Royale*, 5.8.1582–5.
- 34 Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, esp. chap. 4.
- 35 Note the loathing for metalepsis in François Hédelin, abbé d'Aubignac's *Pratique du théâtre*, 56–60.
- 36 See Hélène Merlin-Kajman's discussion of *Nicomède* in *L'absolutisme dans les lettres et les deux corps du roi: passions et politique*, chap. 3. Note though that, focused primarily on Corneille's projection of his identity as author, Merlin-Kajman reads the hero's name as an anagram for *comédie* rather than *comédien*. Omitting the telltale *n* in order to stress Corneille's status as poet, she is perhaps less attentive to the degree to which the poet grounds his authority in the mediating autonomy he grants his heroes and heroines. See Christopher Braider, *The Matter of Mind: Reason and Experience in the Age of Descartes*, chap. 3.
- 37 Benjamin, *Origin*, 70–2, 123–5.
- 38 Roland Barthes, *Sur Racine*, 50.
- 39 The Oedipal reading of Racine's relationship to Corneille goes way back. The best versions are Terence Cave, *Recognitions: A Study in Poetics*, pt. 2, chap. 3; Fumaroli, *Héros et orateurs*, pt. 5; Richard E. Goodkin, *Birth Marks: The Tragedy of Primogeniture in Pierre Corneille, Thomas Corneille, and Jean Racine*; and Amy Wygant, "Medea, Poison and the Epistemology of Error in *Phèdre*," 62–71.
- 40 Blair Hoxby, *What Was Tragedy? Theory and the Early Modern Canon*, chap. 1.
- 41 Braider, *The Matter of Mind*, 16–17.
- 42 Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, *L'Art poétique*, canto 4, ll. 193–210. In *Satires, Épîtres, Art poétique*, ed. Jean-Pierre Collinet, 257.
- 43 Paul Bénichou, *Morales du Grand siècle*.
- 44 For a splendid account of the costs as well as fruits of the poet's underlying opportunism, Alain Viala, *Racine, la stratégie du caméléon*.
- 45 Benjamin, *Origin*, 106–10.
- 46 On Orestes' problematic performance in the role of ambassador, see Timothy Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy*, chap. 7.
- 47 See Braider, *Baroque Self-Invention and Historical Truth*, esp. intro. and chap. 3, the latter focused on the poetics of tragedy. But also, in addition to Benjamin, see José Maravall, *The Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure*, trans. Terry Cochran, and almost anything by Louis Marin, but esp. *La parole mangée*

- et autres essais théologico-politiques* and *De la représentation*, ed. Daniel Arasse, Alain Cantillon, Giovanni Careri, Danièle Cohn, Pierre-Antoine Fabre, and Françoise Marin.
- 48 Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent,” in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey, 29. I note in passing that this would also seem to be the aim of Thomas Nagel’s attempt to naturalize teleology in *Mind and Cosmos*, esp. chap. 7.
  - 49 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Reason in History*, trans. Robert S. Hartman, 44.
  - 50 For Karl Marx’s remark about Hegel, *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes, vol. 1, 103. (The text speaks of the dialectic rather than history, but it amounts to the same.) On the saturnine turn in German philosophy of history, Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, chap. 6 on Burckhardt and chap. 9 on Nietzsche. Also see Lionel Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt: A Study in Untimely Ideas*, for its analysis of both Burckhardt’s and Nietzsche’s anxieties about history from the standpoint of “the masses.”
  - 51 Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff, 270. The setting could not be more telling in that religion, already compromised in his view by the Calvinist contribution to the emergent “spirit” of capitalism, could hardly survive the sociological analysis he put it to. For a valuable critique, see Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, chap. 2. Note though that, as evinced by books like *Persecution and the Art of Writing* and *The City and Man*, the values Strauss defends against Weberian reduction are decidedly esoteric, screened from the masses by layers of ironic counter-statement that only a tiny intellectual elite can penetrate.
  - 52 Benjamin, *Origin*, 36.
  - 53 Ibid., 35–7.
  - 54 Sabine Chaouche, *L’art du comédien: déclamation et jeu scénique en France à l’âge classique (1629–1680)*, e.g., 229–40 and 315–51. Also see Alain Riffaud, *La ponctuation du théâtre imprimé au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*; and Roger Chartier, *L’Œuvre, l’Atelier et la Scène: Trois études de mobilité textuelle*, 26–34. Note how Chaouche’s discussion of *mise en spectacle* (133–58) is dictated by poetics.
  - 55 Chaouche, *L’art du comédien*, 27–80.
  - 56 Molière, *Les Précieuses ridicules*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Georges Forestier, 2 vols., 1.3. Subsequent references to Molière are to this edition and appear in the text.
  - 57 Our source for the visit is Gilles Ménage, *Menagiana, ou, bons mots, rencontres agréables, pensées judicieuses et observations curieuses de M. Ménage*, first published in Amsterdam by Adrian Braakman in 1693. I cite here the 2nd, enlarged ed., vol. 1, 9–10. For a brilliant commentary, Merlin-Kajman, *L’absolutisme dans les lettres*, 108–10. As Merlin-Kajman observes (n. 13, 108–9), it is not clear from Ménage’s account whether the role in question was that of Herod in Tristan’s play or that of Massinissa in Jean Mairet’s *La Sophonisbe*. Since his performance in the former role was said by Guez de Balzac to have been the actor’s masterpiece, I

prefer to think it was Herod. To be sure, since, like Herod, Massinissa presents the spectacle of a king unmanned by sexual passion, it makes no great difference which role he performed for the cardinal. Still, that it was in fact Herod Mondory played seems likely in that Herod is the less reprehensible of the two. For where Massinissa finally sacrifices his passion for Sophonisba to base political calculation (and fear), Herod remains true to love even in murderous madness.

- 58 Paul Scarron, *Le Romant comique*, ed. Henri Bénac, and La Bruyère, *Les Caractères*, “Des femmes,” car. 33.
- 59 For especially interesting analyses of both the charges against Molière and the dynamics of charge and counter-charge in which Molière and his enemies were jointly ensnared, see Larry F. Norman, *The Public Mirror: Molière and the Social Commerce of Depiction*; and Joan DeJean, *The Reinvention of Obscenity: Sex, Lies, and Tabloids in Early Modern France*, chap. 3.
- 60 For the classic survey, see Jonas A. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*.
- 61 Dissimulation has been a major issue ever since Norbert Elias’s *The Civilizing Process* first appeared in German in 1939. However, it has gained renewed life especially over the past decade or so. For a useful recent overview, covering the European scene as a whole, see Jon R. Snyder, *Dissimulation and the Culture of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe*. The shrewdest work on the topic I know, relating it to the performative character of early modern public selves generally, is found in Berger, *Fictions of the Pose*, chap. 3, and the same author’s *The Absence of Grace*. A topical period lesson on the relationship between deception and self-deception is found in François de La Rochefoucauld’s *Maximes* (1665).
- 62 Pierre Nicole, *Traité de la comédie*, ed. Georges Couton, 41–2.
- 63 Bryson, *Word and Image*, chap. 2.
- 64 Joseph R. Roach, *The Player’s Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting*, 2nd ed., chap. 2.
- 65 Denis Diderot, *Paradoxe sur le comédien, précédé de l’Entretien sur le Fils naturel*, ed. Raymond Laubreaux, 131.
- 66 The best introduction to the renewed *querelle de la moralité du théâtre* of the second half of the seventeenth century is Marc Fumaroli, “*Sacerdos sive rhetor, orator sive histrio: théologie et moralité du théâtre de Corneille à Molière*,” in *Héros et orateurs*, 449–91.
- 67 Corneille, *Nicomède*, 2.1.413–20.

## 6 The Experiment of Beauty: *Vraisemblance Extraordinaire* in Lafayette’s *Princesse de Clèves*

- 1 Leaving aside the tricky problem of Hellenistic forerunners like Longus’s *Daphnis and Chloe* or Heliodorus’s *Aethiopica*, both of which found attentive readers in seventeenth-century France, the closest prior parallel would seem to be Murasaki

- Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji*. On the impact and enabling period concomitants of the rediscovery of Hellenistic fiction, see Terence Cave, *Pré-histoires: Textes trouvés au seuil de la modernité*, chap. 5. For *La Princesse de Clèves* itself, I use the version in Mme de Lafayette, *Romans et Nouvelles*, ed. Alain Niderst, 249–416.
- 2 On Lafayette's debts to romance, Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Gender and Culture*, which, in making a strong case for awarding romance a crucial role in creating (rather than avoiding or resisting) the novel, says much of interest about Lafayette. Also, from a perspective less sympathetic to romance, Steven Rendall, "Trapped between Romance and Novel: A Defense of the *Princesse de Clèves*," in *An Inimitable Example: The Case for the Princesse de Clèves*, ed. Patrick Henry, 127–55, and Kathleen Wine, "Romance and Novel in *La Princesse de Clèves*," in *Approaches to Teaching Lafayette's The Princess of Clèves*, ed. Beasley and Jensen, 147–57.
  - 3 Nicholas Paige, "Lafayette's Impossible Princess: On (Not) Making Literary History," 1061–77. Paige is right to point out that the *Princesse* did not make literary history in the way we think. But this does not mean that, as he seems to suggest, the book fails to meet what we now see as the criteria for novels. On the contrary, and for the reasons he himself ably brings out in arguing that Lafayette's invention of an historically "impossible" heroine enabled her to induce period readers to identify with her heroine as a wholly autonomous individual, she does in effect write a nineteenth-century novel *avant la lettre*. For Paige's source on "secret histories," see Jean-Baptiste-Henri de Trousset, seigneur de Valincour, *Lettres à la marquise de \*\*\* sur La Princesse de Clèves*, 104–11.
  - 4 E.g., Valincour, *Lettres*, 5–8, who felt the introduction was too long and ought to have been broken up and put into the mouths of character's like the heroine's mother.
  - 5 See Michael G. Paulson, *Facets of a Princess: Multiple Readings of Madame de La Fayette's "La Princesse de Clèves"*, chap. 5. Alain Niderst comments in a note on Lafayette's "curious conception of history," in which "small facts of private life have consequences of extreme importance." See Lafayette, *Romans et Nouvelles*, 449. But he rightly observes that she merely followed her historical sources in this. So, in his way, does Pascal in the famous fragment on the world-historical significance of the size of Cleopatra's nose. The "secret history" approach to historical explanation was deeply rooted in the early modern imitation of ancient historiography as they found it in writers like Plutarch, Tacitus, and Suetonius, and it survived deep into the Enlightenment and into the Revolutionary era as well, especially in the form of the *libelles* to which Robert Darnton devotes his wonderful *The Devil in the Holy Water, or the Art of Slander from Louis XIV to Napoleon*.
  - 6 For the civil wars, see Robert Knecht, *The French Wars of Religion, 1559–1598*, 2nd ed.; Arlette Jouanna, Jacqueline Boucher, Dominique Biloghi, and Guy Thiec, EBSCO Publishing : eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 3/5/2023 9:39 PM via RUSSIAN STATE LIBRARY  
AN: 1885870 ; Christopher Braider.; *Experimental Selves : Person and Experience in Early Modern Europe*  
Account: s7167233

- Histoire et dictionnaire des Guerres de religion*; and Mack P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562–1629*. Holt extends the story through the settlement following the royal siege of the Protestant city of La Rochelle in 1627–8. For recent, closer looks at the wars' social and cultural resonance, see Mark Greengrass, *Governing Passions: Peace and Reform in the French Kingdom, 1576–1585*; and Andrea Frisch, *Forgetting Differences: Tragedy, Historiography, and the French Wars of Religion*.
- 7 For the classic formulation of this thesis, see Lucien Goldmann, *Le Dieu caché: Étude sur la vision tragique dans les Pensées de Pascal et le théâtre de Racine*, chaps. 5–7. Goldmann was in part anticipated by Paul Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle*, esp. 149–74.
  - 8 Far and away the best general overview remains Orest A. Ranum, *The Fronde: A French Revolution, 1648–1652*.
  - 9 Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle*, intro. and the discussions of “the Cornelian hero” (15–67) and “political drama” in Corneille (68–100), examining the spirit of feudal individualism defeated with the *Fronde des princes*.
  - 10 In addition to DeJean's *Tender Geographies*, see Nancy K. Miller, “Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction,” in Henry, *An Inimitable Example*, 15–30; Donna Kuizenga, “An Inimitable Model?,” *ibid.*, 71–83; Paulson, *Facets of a Princess*, chaps. 1–2; and Katherine Ann Jensen, “Making Sense of the Ending: Passion, Virtue, and Female Subjectivity,” in *Approaches*, ed. Beasley and Jensen, 60–75.
  - 11 On misogynistic resistance to seventeenth-century French feminine writing in general and the way it continues to distort our picture of the *grand siècle*, see Faith E. Beasley, *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France*.
  - 12 Michèle Longino, *Performing Motherhood: The Sévigné Correspondence*, and “The Mother-Daughter Subtext in *La Princesse de Clèves*,” in *Approaches*, ed. Beasley and Jensen, 76–84. The inestimable Ellen McClure is also hard at work on this problem.
  - 13 Victor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. and trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, 3–24.
  - 14 Roger de Rabutin, comte de Bussy, letter to Mme de Sévigné, as cited in Maurice Laugaa, *Lectures de Madame de La Fayette*, 18–19.
  - 15 All of the relevant documents, including Georges de Scduéry's *Observations sur Le Cid* (1637) and *Les Sentimens de l'Académie Royale sur la tragi-comédie du Cid* (1638), the report of the Academy's findings on the debate composed by Jean Chapelain under Cardinal Richelieu's direct supervision, are assembled in *La Querelle du Cid: Pièces et pamphlets*, ed. Armand Gasté.
  - 16 Valincour, *Lettres*, citing the opinion of the anonymous yet authoritative “Monsieur \*\*\*,” 88–96, and at still greater length, with Castelvetro as the leading authority, 104–20.

- 17 For especially good general discussions, Erica Harth, *Ideology and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France*, and Michael Moriarty, *Taste and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century France*. For Lafayette, see Ralph Albanese, Jr, “Aristocratic Ethos and Ideological Codes in *La Princesse de Clèves*,” in Henry, *An Inimitable Example*, 87–103. Also see Philippe Desan, “The Economy of Love in *La Princesse de Clèves*,” *ibid.*, 104–24, which argues that the book actually winds up on the far, bourgeois end of the social transition it in part tries to forestall.
- 18 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, chap. 1.
- 19 Stéphane Lojkin, *La Scène du roman: Méthode d'analyse*, chap. 3.
- 20 Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, intro.
- 21 Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, pt. 3, chap. 4.
- 22 E.g., Paulson, *Facets of a Princess*, chap. 2.
- 23 Lafayette, *La Comtesse de Tende*, in *Romans et nouvelles*, 429.
- 24 Mitchell Greenberg, *Baroque Bodies: Psychoanalysis and the Culture of French Absolutism*, chap. 3. On the abbé de Choisy more generally, see Lewis C. Seifert, *Manning the Margins: Masculinity and Writing in Seventeenth-Century France*, chap. 6.
- 25 Harry Berger, Jr, *The Absence of Grace*. This is also an underlying theme of the first part of Seifert's *Manning the Margins*, which explores the gender fault lines in the authorized account of courtly masculinity in seventeenth-century France.
- 26 Valincour, *Lettres*, 8–12.
- 27 Roland Barthes, *Sur Racine*, 18.
- 28 This insight goes back to René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*; and Tony Tanner, *Adultery and the Novel: Contract and Transgression*.
- 29 This notion too has venerable roots. See Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A historico-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature* (1920), trans. Anna Bostock; Marthe Robert, *Roman des origines et origines du roman*; and Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740*, esp. part 3, on the “dialectical constitution of the novel.”
- 30 Pierre Corneille, *Discours de la tragédie*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, ed. Georges Couton, 168–9.
- 31 Gérard Genette, “Vraisemblance et motivation,” in *Figures II*, 71–99.
- 32 Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, ed. Alain Niderst, 13.
- 33 David L. Sedley, “A Mathematical Key to *La Princesse de Clèves*,” 493–516.
- 34 See above, [chapter 1](#).
- 35 Sedley, “A Mathematical Key,” 498–501.
- 36 Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, ed. Alain Niderst, 11.



- 37 I owe this insight to conversations with my graduate student, Arianne Margolin, who is completing a dissertation on early modern thought experiments generally.
- 38 René Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, in *Œuvres philosophiques*, vol. 1, ed. Ferdinand Alquié, 578–9.
- 39 Alain Badiou, *L'être et l'événement*. Badiou's bondage to the most grandiloquent traditions of Continental metaphysics vitiates his efforts to make sense of the role ordinary human beings play in changing our sense of what is real and possible (Badiou's "Being") by doing things that precipitate change (Badiou's "The Event"). To the extent that it can be disentangled from his hyperventilating prose, his argument is essentially that of Hannah Arendt's *Between Past and Future*, which I admire in large part because it is written with great clarity and directness, as befits someone who succeeded in escaping Heidegger's gravitational pull – perhaps because she knew what sort of person the Sage of the Schwarzwald really was.

## 7 Groping in the Dark: Aesthetics and Ontology in Diderot and Kant

- 1 Apostolidès, *Le roi-machine: spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV*, 141–3.
- 2 For his account of the novel, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; and above all *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson.
- 3 Such is, again, the lesson of Steve Pincus's 1688: *The First Modern Revolution*, where the organs of state control that enabled the administration of James II to reach into every corner of the kingdom also enabled resistance to organize and drive him from power. I also note the general conclusion reached in Marcel Gauchet's "L'État au miroir de la raison d'État: La France et la chrétienté," in *Théoriciens et théories de la raison d'État aux XVI<sup>e</sup> et au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, ed. Yves-Charles Zarka. For the emergence of the political doctrine of reason of state bore witness to two deeply interdependent phenomena: that the state itself had finally emerged as an autonomous social fact; and that even the common people to whom the period theorist Zuccolo attributed the expression were aware that it had done so, and both commented on and presumed to judge its operations. All of which in turn gives fresh point to Jürgen Habermas's core thesis in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence, namely, that however self-evidently suspect "bourgeois society" may seem to be, critical conversation was a constitutive feature of its rise.
- 4 Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*.
- 5 I use the following editions of the Diderot texts I cite frequently: *Essais sur la peinture*, in *Œuvres esthétiques*, ed. Paul Vernière, 657–740; *Salons*, vols. 2 and 3, ed.

Jean Seznec and Jean Adhémar; *Lettre sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient*, in *Œuvres philosophiques*, ed. Michel Delon, 129–98.

- 6 The “taking down from the cross” is the starting point for contemplation beginning at midnight on the sixth day of the third week of the exercises. See *Powers of Imagining: A Philosophical Hermeneutic of Imagining through the Collected Works of Ignatius de Loyola*, ed. and trans. Antonio T. Nicolas, 141.
- 7 That Diderot’s use of the terms *poétique* and *portraitiste* (or *copiste*) reflects conventional *ut pictura poesis* taste emerges in his discussions of the rivalry between history and genre. One remark especially condenses Diderot’s position: “The genre painter has his scene ceaselessly before his eyes; the history painter has either never seen it or seen it only for an instant. And so the one is a plain and simple imitator or copyist of ordinary nature while the other is, so to speak, the creator of an ideal and poetic nature” (*Essais*, 722). Note too Diderot’s surprisingly conservative definition of the fundamental aim of art: “Make virtue lovable, vice odious, folly striking – this is the object of any honest man who takes up the pen, the brush, or the chisel” (*ibid.*, 718).
- 8 For Fried’s quite different analysis, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 141–5.
- 9 Compare the effect were Coresus to peer in our direction with those that even modest changes of expression would produce in Raphael’s portrayal of the ancient sage Antinoüs: “Preserve all of the features of his handsome face as they are; just lift a corner of the mouth: the expression becomes ironic, and the face pleases you less. Restore the mouth to its original state and raise the eyebrows; the character becomes arrogant, and will please you less. Lift both corners of the mouth at the same time, and hold the eyes wide open: you’ll have a cynical physiognomy, and will fear for your daughters” (*Essais*, 697).
- 10 Note that Diderot’s remarks on Greuze’s picture are confined to analysis of the preparatory sketch exhibited in the Salon of 1765.
- 11 Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 107–8.
- 12 See Marcel Gauchet’s entry on Necker in François Furet and Mona Ozouf (eds.), *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française*, revised ed.
- 13 Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 155–6. Compare with Diderot’s remarks on what he expects of a spectator (as opposed to an actor) in theatre, *Paradoxe sur le comédien, précédé de l’Entretien sur le Fils naturel*, ed. Raymond Laubreaux, 131.
- 14 Chardin’s *A Lady Taking Tea* deserves extended commentary. See Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, chap. 3. Though Baxandall does not mention absorption per se, he explores the relevance of John Locke’s doctrine of ideas. In this reading, the tea-drinking lady is an artefactual condensation of the “mental images” painter and beholder form in the act of representing her: an act in turn conceived as a process of mental construction

wholly separate from the lady herself. The lady's absorbed remoteness thus reflects both Chardin's aesthetic and authoritative period philosophy of perception.

- 15 Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, chap. 2.
- 16 *Naturel* is the major term, and unpacking it will be our central concern. However, *nonchalant* and *naïf* deserve comment. The first characterizes actions, whether those portrayed or those the painter performs in depicting them. As such, it faces in two directions: towards *le naturel* by virtue of what looks like natural spontaneity and towards what Renaissance Italian calls *sprezzatura*, for which indeed *nonchalance* is a ready French translation. Diderot's usage is distinguished by what we might call the *embourgeoisement* of the aristocratic ideal of artful grace in Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (1528) and Giovanni della Casa's *Galateo* (1558). Where *sprezzatura* denotes the complex social performances necessitated by conditions of life at court, Diderot's *nonchalant* describes the relaxed unself-consciousness of people engaged in the world of private domesticity. *Le naïf* meanwhile designates artistic productions and points towards the use Friedrich Schiller consecrates in *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (1795–6). The term thereby relates to the spontaneity of folkloric art forms, prior to the sort of super-civilized posturing Diderot stigmatizes as *la manière* (e.g., *Essais*, 669–73).
- 17 See Diderot's praise of Chardin's *The Skinned Skate* in the *Salon* of 1763. Though the object portrayed is not only trivial but “disgusting,” it is nonetheless “the flesh of this same fish, it is its skin, it is its blood; the very face of the thing would not affect us differently.” He continues: “We understand nothing of this magic. We have thick coats of colour applied one on top of another, and whose effect transpires from below to the surface” (*Ceuvres esthétiques*, 484).
- 18 Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 61. Also Victor Stoichita, *L'Instauration du tableau: Métapeinture à l'aube des temps modernes*, chap. 1, on the way in which embrasures (like other architectural motifs examined later in his book) produce doubling effects that enable painting to pose “the problem of representation as such” (27). Bryan Jay Wolf, *Vermeer and the Invention of Seeing*, and Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant l'image: Question posée aux fins d'une histoire de l'art*, develop similar insights, the former via an exploration of vision in Vermeer, the latter in terms of the artwork's invincible resistance to the “ends” art history tries to impose. Hans Belting locates the same phenomenon in the Netherlandish fifteenth century – the more richly in that, like Michael Baxandall in *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, 2nd ed., he grounds painters' self-conscious discovery of the artwork's autonomy in social conditions of market, trade, and personal self-assertion. See Hans Belting and Christiane Kruse, *Die Erfindung des Gemäldes: Das erste Jahrhundert der niederländischen Malerei*, 22–32 on the empowering conflict between market and court, 39–45 on the “modernity” of

portraits, and 74–9 for a discussion of the framing effects of windows and mirrors comparable to Stoichita's. Note however that Stoichita, Wolf, and Belting all date the formal onset of the conditions underlying artistic modernity far earlier than Fried.

- 19 One of the many remarkable things about T.J. Clark's *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* is its fusion of a Greenbergian sense of form with a Marxian sense of content.
- 20 Together with Wolf, chap. 7, see Christopher Braider, *Refiguring the Real: Picture and Modernity in Word and Image, 1400–1700*, 249–65, and *Baroque Self-Invention and Historical Truth: Hercules at the Crossroads*, chap. 2.
- 21 I can only point here to the problems linking forms of experience, the rise of aesthetics, and the profession of art writing as an expression of painterly naturalism from the later European fifteenth century on. In addition to Baxandall's *Patterns of Intention* and *Painting and Experience*, and Fried's *Absorption and Theatricality*, books I have found especially helpful are Berger, *Fictions of the Pose*; David Carrier, *Principles of Art History Writing*; T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing*; Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art*; Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*; and David Summers, *The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics*.
- 22 In addition to Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 74–6, see René D'Amor, *Chardin, la chair et l'objet*, which in many ways quarrels with what D'Amor calls Diderot's "incroyable suffisance," his insufferable smugness in the face of genre paintings like Chardin's, whose lack of redeeming historical subjects puts them at the commentator's mercy. D'Amor's remark chimes with Jacques Chouillet, "Commentaire: 'La promenade Vernet,'" *Recherches sur Diderot et l'Encyclopédie* 2 (1987): 123–63, where the author observes how "Diderot becomes Vernet" (154). Absorption thus gives way to its self-assertive twin in "the apparently measureless ambitions of Diderotian discourse" (148). The result, again, is modern art writing.
- 23 Roger de Piles, *Cours de peinture par principes*, 27. For a brilliant commentary, see Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *Le Couleur éloquente: Rhétorique et peinture à l'âge classique*, "Du Vrai en peinture ou les divers usages de la cosmétique," 182–211.
- 24 Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. Paul Carus, extensively revised by James W. Ellington; and *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor.
- 25 Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, author's preface and 14–18 in his intro.
- 26 The phrase appears in "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent," in Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey, 34.

The original German reads "aus so krummen Holze, als woraus der Mensch  
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gemacht ist, kann nichts Gerades gezimmert werden,” Akademie ed., vol. 8 (Berlin: Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, 1912), 23. Humphrey gives “from such warped wood as man is made of, nothing straight can be fashioned.” I prefer (and so use) the looser but more colourful and, I think, tonally more faithful rendering by Isaiah Berlin, who makes it the title to a collection of his own essays, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*.

- 27 See Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History*. Where Diderot is a fox like Tolstoy, Kant is a hedgehog like Tolstoy's alter ego, Dostoevsky. For a more recent use of the trope in a compelling defense of moral value from both logical and scientific reduction, Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs*.
- 28 As we will note shortly, the core issue in period thought about blindness was “Molyneux's problem,” posed in a public letter to John Locke in 1688. For overviews, see Michael J. Morgan, *Molyneux's Question: Vision, Touch, and the Philosophy of Perception*; Jessica Riskin, *Science in the Age of Sensibility: The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment*; and Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*.
- 29 Diderot cites William Ingham's *The Life of Dr. Nicolas Saunderson* (1747) as his source for the mathematician's last moments and final words (*Lettre*, 163–4). But nothing in that book corresponds to Diderot's report – not least because no such book appears to exist. See the editor's note, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 1111.
- 30 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 5.
- 31 See Andrew Curran, “Diderot's Revisionism: Enlightenment and Blindness in the *Lettre sur les aveugles*,” 75–93, and *L'Aveugle et le philosophe, ou comment la cécité fait penser*, ed. Marion Chottin.
- 32 Diderot puts this argument in Saunderson's mouth. But he also develops it in the *Rêve de d'Alembert* (1769; first published 1782). There it is designed to shake the fellow *encyclopédiste's* mathematics-based certainty about the world's essential unity, stability, and necessity as accessible to reason. (That Diderot should do this by adducing a contrary set of hypotheses visualized as a nightmare in which the mathematician's own unconscious torments him speaks volumes to the wider issues at stake.) Diderot's polygenic cosmology attacks the paradoxically unitary postulates underpinning Leibniz's doctrine of possible worlds. In Leibniz, the fact that there may well be (indeed logically are) an infinite number of alternatives to the world we know in effect pre-empts the potential for radical change Diderot posits. Since, for Leibniz, possible worlds coexist in logical space, all of them taken together guarantee not only the uniqueness and stability but the rightness of the one we know – the one the doctrine of “sufficient reason” teaches had to exist just because it does. Diderot's implicit critique of Leibniz also amounts to a critique of Spinoza. While, in direct contrast to Leibniz, Spinoza was a strict monist, he too argues that the world had to exist in the way it does just because it does in fact

- exist in that form. See Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley, 1p33.
- 33 Diderot anticipates all this when he writes in the run-up to the discussion of Saunderson that “[t]here is a species of abstraction of which so few men are capable that it seems reserved for pure intelligences. It is the one through which everything may be reduced to numerical unities [...]. This way of philosophizing is far too high above us, and too close to that of the Supreme Being who, as an English geometer ingeniously puts it, perpetually *geometrizes* in the universe” (*Letter*, 144–5; Diderot’s emphasis).
- 34 For “adequate ideas,” Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p34–47.
- 35 See Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750*, 709–13. Also see Paul Vernière, “Le Spinozisme et l’Encyclopédie,” in *Lumières ou clair-obscur? Trente essais sur Diderot et quelques autres*, 275–86. Note too that, in assigning a Spinozan cosmology to Saunderson on his deathbed, the *Letter* echoes one of the strategies Pierre Bayle used to promote Spinoza’s thought without expressly endorsing it: that of depicting him as a virtuous atheist untroubled by the prospect of dying. See Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 331–41. The fact that Diderot avoids Spinoza’s name goes far to explain why Diderot specialists also rarely mention him. Jean-Claude Bourdin’s otherwise useful *Diderot et le matérialisme* contains no reference to Spinoza at all.
- 36 Gassendi’s remark appears in his objections to Descartes’s *Meditations* in René Descartes, *Œuvres philosophiques*, ed. Ferdinand Alquié, vol. 2, 274.
- 37 For a recent historical review of imagination in its ambiguous, pre-Romantic character as faculty of perception as well as creation, see John D. Lyons, *Before Imagination: Embodied Thought from Montaigne to Rousseau*, intro. and chap. 1. Also see above, [chapter 2](#).
- 38 Though the disjunctive equivalence, “God or Nature,” controls Spinoza’s argument throughout, it does not surface *en toutes lettres* till the preface to pt. 4, *Ethics*, 321.
- 39 On Boswell’s visit to Hume and its congruence with the general problematic explored here, see Christopher Braider, “Unlearning the Sublime,” in *The Sublime and Education*, ed. J. Jennifer Jones, special issue in the *Praxis* series, *Romantic Circles* (August 2010), [http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/sublime\\_education/braider](http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/sublime_education/braider).
- 40 Feynman made the remark in a TV documentary by Christopher Sykes, “The Last Journey of a Genius” (1989), produced by BBC TV in association with WGBH, Boston, and Cornet/MTI Film and Video. On the Spinozan (and ultimately Lucretian) pedigree of Diderot’s talk of flies and Feynman’s of water bugs, see Christopher Braider, “Spiders and Flies: Imagining ‘The World’ in Early Modern European Natural Philosophy,” in *Poesis and Modernity in the Old and New Worlds*, ed. Anthony J. Cascardi and Leah Meadowbrook, 43–65.



- 41 For a shrewd account of what he calls the “material conditions” of the composition of Diderot’s *Salons*, Stéphane Lojkin, *L’Œil révolté: Les Salons de Diderot*, 59–86.
- 42 On the *Salons* as Diderot would have encountered them, Lojkin, *L’Œil révolté*, 29–58.
- 43 On the identification of the “first site,” see *Salons*, 3.23–4. Oddly, Seznec and Adhémar do not name the two paintings they identify in the order in which they appear in Diderot’s text, so we do not learn that the first was *The Abundant Spring* until 3.130. Note that, though long lost to us, the original has been refound. See Stéphane Lojkin at <http://sites.univ-provence.fr/GenerateurNotice.php?numnotice=A4434> (last accessed on 27 August 2012). Lojkin graciously supplied the digital image used in illustration here.
- 44 The Promenade’s setting is agreed to be the baron d’Holbach’s country house. See Lojkin, *L’Œil révolté*, 377. Note though that, as Lojkin observes (396), the setting of the Promenade is not that of the pictures that inspire it.
- 45 As Lojkin notes, Diderot is in Lucretius’s company here as well as that of Virgil, Horace, and Rousseau (*L’Œil révolté*, 395–407).
- 46 Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste,” in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller, 226–49.
- 47 We discuss the culture of fact in [chapter 1](#). For an introduction to the problem, Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact*.

## Conclusion

- 1 McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600–1740*, and *The Secret History of Domesticity*.
- 2 Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch, 46.

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